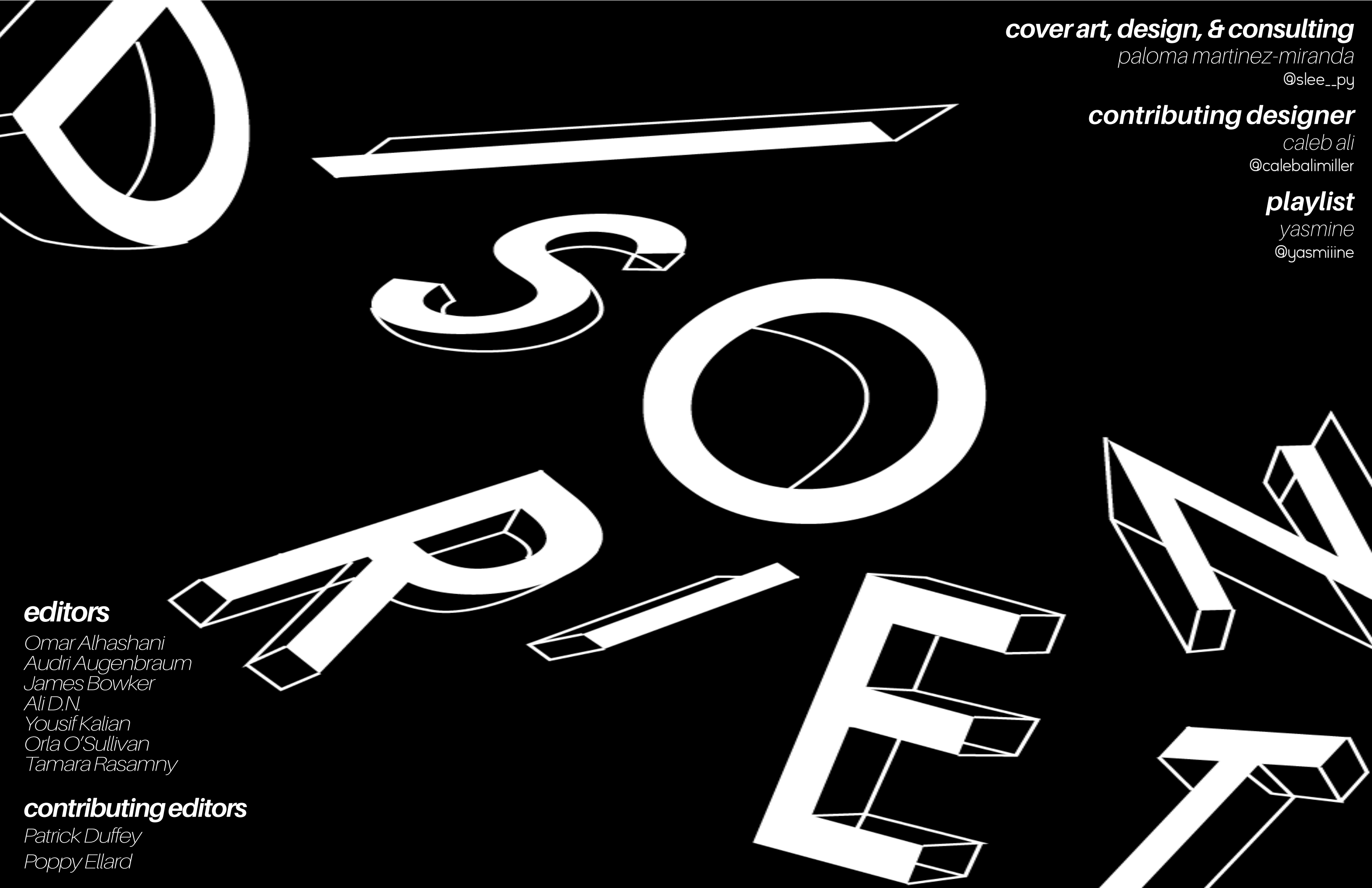




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ISSUE 1.
DISORIENT



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Contributors

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Omar Alhashani is the founder of *Khabar Keslan*, edited multiple issues of the *Arab Studies Journal*, and has worked on Bassam Haddad’s Knowledge Production Project. Born in Saudi Arabia, raised in Beirut, and graduated from Reed College, Omar now lives between Washington DC, where he works as an assistant editor at a policy think-tank, and New York City.

Sultan Al Ramahi was born in Abu Dhabi (still here) and raised between the UAE and Singapore. *An architect by training he is currently planning communities in the desert as well as figuring out if he has a future as an illustrator. He hopes to continue his studies in Visual Communication soon so he can make some sense of the Middle East.*

Fatima Al Suwaidi is an architectural Engineering student living in Dubai, author of *When We Wonder*. Her work has previously appeared in *MICRO//MACRO* zine by *Nu Lit House* and others. She is currently working on her second book.

Dilan Arslan is a Kurdish illustrator, cartoonist, and satirist born in Istanbul, Turkey and raised in Ontario, Canada.

She recently graduated from Carleton University with a BA in Communications and Media Studies and hopes to continue exploring the role of orientalism in western media through further education, advocacy, and a little bit of humour.

Hamza Bilbeisi is a short story writer from Amman, Jordan. He was born and raised in the capital, and a large chunk of his upbringing was also spent in Aqaba, where his mother’s family is from. He is focused on exploring themes of masculinity, mental health, childhood, westernization, and political occupation. He is looking to carve ways for regional creatives to produce art without succumbing to a ‘Western’ lens. He primarily distributes his work through Instagram (@ketabhamza) and hopes he can help form a community for young creatives from the MENA region to also put forward their creative outlets. Hamza is constantly looking for more themes to explore and finds comfort in the small, overlooked details of his surroundings and interpersonal relationships. He also writes poetry, *sometimes*.

Ahmed Drebika is a multidisciplinary artist who has exhibited photographic, video, sound, and installation work. Born in Tripoli, Libya and residing in Toronto, Canada, he often finds himself acting as a mediator between both. He will be attending the Intermedia program at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec in 2017, and is currently developing a series of new media work that confronts Libya’s fragmented history and identity.

Rama Duwaji is a Syrian illustrator and visual artist born and based in the U.S.A. With work mainly consisting of portraits and simplified designs, she utilizes her art work to discuss topics within the Middle East, such as beauty standards and misogyny.

Mariam Elba is co-editor for *Muftah’s* Egypt and North Africa pages. Mariam

is a New York-based, Egyptian American freelance writer covering grassroots initiatives, popular media, and cultural representation in American Muslim communities and in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt. She has bylines in *The Nation*, *PolicyMic*, *Waging Nonviolence*, *Truthout*, and *Muftah*. Mariam holds a BA in English and History from CUNY Baruch College and a MA in Journalism and Near Eastern Studies at NYU. She has written about emerging social infrastructures in public transportation in urban Egypt and the history of modern sha’abi (popular, working class) music in Egypt, as well as the material conditions in which it emerged. Mariam hopes to continue writing on everyday trends among marginalized and disenfranchised populations in the Middle East and the United States.

Sofia Elian: *Growing up in Lebanon for fifteen years, I was exposed to a variety of cultures, languages, and geographic elements that act as inspiration for my art today. I currently attend American University in Washington D.C. majoring in Graphic Design and working as a Freelance Artist.*

Zaina El Said was born and raised in Amman, Jordan. Her artistic journey began in 2010 by painting regional Arab culture and folklore. She then began to explore different mediums, such as collage and digital art—cutting out images from magazines, fairy tale books, posters and endless material found in nature to create a surreal narrative. Zaina held solo and group exhibitions in Jordan, and around the Middle East and Europe. Her works have been exhibited internationally in various art events and fairs.

Nour Hifaoui Fakhoury is an illustrator and comic artist based in Lebanon. *Living in a city like Beirut, you cannot but become involved in the chaotic and social struggle. This is what I try to translate with my art. Recently, with a couple of friends we created a comics collective, called Zeez.*

Amir H. Fallah was born in Tehran, Iran in 1979. He received his BFA from Maryland Institute College of Art in 2001 and his MFA from University of California Los Angeles in 2005. Fallah’s artistic oeuvre encompasses painting, photography, sculpture, and installation combined with a visual vocabulary that includes collage and complex patterning. The works present a critical observation of the deconstruction and appropriation of portraiture in its various forms. Fallah’s practice presents an alternative perspective to entrenched art historical portraiture traditions and the dynamics of modern day art collection and art making. Intertwined with these concerns are his reflections upon identity and personal narrative. Fallah has exhibited widely in exhibits across the United States and internationally.

Marwa Fichera is a young poet from Italy currently undertaking a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology in London, United Kingdom. *My work is mainly based on identity, race, gender, and mental health. It is inspired by my multi-ethnic background (Italian, Somali and Eritrean) and life experiences during my previous residency in Italy, Tunisia, and now in the UK.*

Zachary J. Foster is a Product Manager at Academia and a PhD candidate in Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. The title of his dissertation is “The Invention of Palestine.”

Farrah Fray is a writer, activist and poet studying in London by way of Libya. She has written for *Kinguistics* as well as *Letters ly Libya* and translated for *Haawiyat*, a Syrian comic aimed at refugees. Her work explores culture, displacement, feminism and identity with a focus on Libya and London. Her latest poetry collection will be published in September 2017.

Rachel Furlow is an independent Middle East analyst focusing on Yemen and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, currently based in Amman, Jordan. She

is an alumna of the Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University.

Ceem Haidar (pronounced Seem) is the Co-founder and Managing Partner of The Commery, a communications consulting firm based in Beirut. She majored in Communications Arts, where she headed the first daily university newspaper in the Middle East. Her career path began in journalism, shifted into Public Relations at a multinational firm and then led her to the Big4 corporate world. But she wanted ‘more’, which led her to setting up the communications consultancy at 26, while concurrently teaching at University. For as long as she can remember, she has been curious, exploring the world around her and documenting it via writing, painting, photography, and deep discussions.

Rawand Issa was born in 1992. She worked as a writer/journalist for five years in Lebanon. In 2015 she decided to make a switch in her career, and jumped to illustration and comic making. She published two publications, [Mish Men El Marikh/Not from Mars](#) and *22 August*. Her illustrations were published in different magazines in Lebanon, and she’s currently publishing a one page comic strip at the monthly magazine of *The Legal Agenda*.

Ayham Jabr: *29 year old, born in Damascus, Syria. Working mainly as a video editor for TV Series and films, passionate about graphic design, photography and collage digital and analog. The love I have for science fiction films, stories, and theories are a main source of inspiration behind my art.*

Mohamed Khalid: *MK, a different identity to Mohamed Khalid. An Emirati artist who wouldn’t be labeled that to actual Emiratis. An artist who works with different mediums and makes different things.*

Yousif Kalian is an Iraqi-American who is a lover of all things Mesopotamia, Eastern, and Western Syriac Christianity—and various other interests. He is found regularly drinking tea or coffee and listening to Fairuz, Omar Souleyman, or Biggie.

Hoda Katebi is a Muslim-Iranian abolitionist, photographer, author, community organizer, and radical fashion blogger based in Chicago. Her research focuses on the politics of the underground fashion movement in Iran and the intersections of feminism, resistance, fashion, and nation-hood. In 2013 she started *JooJoo Azad*, a radical, anti-capitalist fashion blog that has been praised by the Malala Foundation Blog and Mother Jones. In 2016 Hoda published the book *Tehran Streetstyle*, the first-ever in-print collection of street-style photography from Iran aimed to challenge both Western Orientalism and domestic Iranian mandatory dress codes. She is a member of the For the People Artist Collective and core organizer with Muslims Organize. Hoda frequently speaks at universities and establishments nationally and her work has been featured in various outlets.

Yasmine Rukia is a no-normal radical thinking muslim who dabbles in short stories. *An Arabesque-American trying to explain the unexplainable, sometimes, always.*

Shoug Sagur—a 20 year old artist, photographer, filmmaker, architecture student from Saudi Arabia—started her journey as a writer and a street photographer when she was twelve years old.

Yasmine comes from a Lebanese/Saudi background. Majoring in Politics & Law while exploring Montreal and Dubai, she mixes music for the soul and creates photo collections when inspiration comes her way.

Featuring

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Editor’s Note

Where did you last see your face? Now, especially, the representation of marginalized groups in media is in crisis. Shepard Fairey’s famous portrait of Munira Ahmed, a hijabi woman draped in the American flag, for one, has become a monolithic depiction of an already essentialized people. But not all Muslim or Middle Eastern women wear hijabs, of course. And not all Middle Easterners and North Africans are Muslims or Arabs. We are Coptic, Tuareg, Kurdish, Yazidi, Syriac, Christian, Turkish, Sufi, Maghrebi, Armenian, Zoroastrian, Persian, Aramean, Druze, Berber, Jewish, and atheist.

Back home, geopolitical shifts circle back to uncertainty. What will become of Yemen? Will the Syrian civil war ever end? How will Iraq be rebuilt? Will Saudi Arabia and Iran finally butt heads? What of Turkish expansionism, or Egyptian and Tunisian political Salafism? Facing unstable futures, dynasties and their opportunists take up space before we have time to organize. The rate of change renders many of us complacent, unwilling to look into the eye of the storm.

To reduce complexity, humans create categories. It’s what we do to make our experiences seem more stable. It’s how our leaders legitimize their ambitions. Yet we know that current labels are profoundly ineffective. Sunni versus Shiite, Islamic versus secular, fries inside versus outside your shawarma... On the ground, these categories naturally start to break down.

Our Summer issue, DISORIENT, encourages the expression of regional identities on their own terms. The region isn’t an indistinguishable morass of warring tribes, Islam, oil-rich sheikhs, and sword-wielding militants on horseback—it’s Egyptian working class pop music, Yemeni conflict mediating poets, wry academics, Muslim feminists, and radical artists. Regional art isn’t just geometric patterns—it’s street signs signaling sadness, hijabis draped in the jungle, women without hijabs, Iranian fashionistas, Ottoman icons and Jack Daniels, burnt matches.

For Khabar Keslan, to DISORIENT is to actively break categories down—to try our best to capture the infinity of experience in the region. It’s an act of harnessing instability’s power, an acceptance that the quest for understanding is never over. Discomfort and confusion, rather than obstacles, are sources of wisdom. DISORIENT is the antidote to the crisis of representation—when individuals, in all of their incoherence, can represent themselves.

DISORIENT is a movement, a long tradition to which this issue pays homage. Current publications such as Ajam Media Collective, Bidoun, Mada Masr, Mashallah News, Muftah, MyKali, Raseef 22, and Reorient: we thank you, for we can only exist because of the work you’ve done.

Now, please, sit back, relax, and make yourself uncomfortable.



ALMOST HOME

AMIR H FALLAH

My approach to art-making is akin to the process of an archaeological dig. I begin by assuming the role of an analytical historian. I investigate my subject's lives through the analysis of their personal belongings. Investigation of these objects slowly reveals the lives of my subjects, a history that becomes a complex mixture of facts and symbolism.

My work is interdisciplinary, but clearly rooted in the canon of portraiture. After I have crafted the histories of the individual subjects and families portrayed in my paintings, site-specific installations are created to provide a framework for the paintings and accompanying sculptures to exist within.

Field research is an integral part of my process. I visit people's homes, and assemble a collection of their belongings that allude to their stories and identities. I become the arbiter of these individuals' histories, curating found elements into contemporary portraiture. Through this process I do not attempt to beautify or flatter my subjects, and focus on integral points of their lives that subsequently shaped who they were as individuals.

In direct opposition to the history of portraiture, I hide the true identity of my subjects by cloaking them in vivid, patterned fabrics found amongst their belongings. The viewer is forced to craft an identity for my subjects through their own interpretation of the curated elements I have presented.

Through the process of art making and the employment of contemporary portraiture, I am exploring the realms of truth through storytelling. Obsessive consideration of truth's limitations can help us understand one another, and this examination of identity is the keystone of my practice.

For more information and higher quality images of Amir Fallah's work, [click here](#).









“IT’S CROWDED AND THERE IS NO MERCY!”

MARIAM ELBA



SHA'ABI MUSIC DISAVOWS A UNITARY EGYPT

*“I wonder about this age
That puts some on the shore
And others are lost at sea
Who have seen torture and agony
And there are the ghalaba who
Receive their share through the eye of a needle...
Those who are satisfied push the hungry...
There are those who drink honey
And there are those who drink bitterness!”*

—Ahmed Adawiya. [‘agaby ‘aleik Ya Zaman](#).
Ahmed Adawiya. Maamoum El Shennawi,
1975

IN THE EARLY 1970S, Ahmed Adawiya came out with one of his first hit songs, “Zahma Ya Dunya Zahma,” or “It’s Crowded, Everywhere is Crowded,” produced by *Sawt Al Hob* on cassette tape, and sold in marketplaces in *sha’abi*—lower, working class—neighborhoods. Millions of Adawiya’s cassettes were reportedly sold as he rose to popularity during in the 1970s. His music was unlike any other mainstream artist’s at the time: he used colloquial slang and sung in a boisterous style considered gauche by the country’s

elite. His first hit song was an anthem to the urban experience in Cairo during a period of immense change: the economic policies of the *infitah*, Egypt’s economic “opening” to private foreign investment were being enacted; the 1973 October war with Israel was raging; and masses of rural migrants were settling into urban centers, straining cities. It is no coincidence that Adawiya’s rise coincided with then-President Sadat’s economic liberalization policies that exacerbated socioeconomic inequality, including the weakening of the public sector; IMF borrowing and the consequential decline in the standard of living; lack of labor regulations, and labor unrest. Before Adawiya himself appeared in the 1980 film *Shaaban Below Zero* singing “Zahma Ya Dunya Zahma,” it was already a staple heard in taxi cabs, marketplaces, and—across the country—those apartments lucky enough to have cassette players.

[“Zahma Ya Dunya Zahma”](#) is a catchy, upbeat song about navigating crowds and traffic to make an appointment on time. The song was popular among youth at the time, and when it was sung in *Shaaban Below Zero*, Adawiya was accompanied by a belly dancer. Although set to a light melody, the lyrics describe a harsh reality of being a resident in a populated, urban area with insufficient services:

*Zahma ya dunya zahma
(It’s crowded, everywhere is crowded)
Zahma we taho el habayeb
(It’s crowded and our loved ones are missing)
Zahma wala ‘adsh rahma
(It’s crowded and there is no mercy)
Moulid we sahbo ghayeb
(It’s a saint’s festival and the saint is missing)*

Adawiya’s song lyrics depict the frustrations that arose as urban areas in Egypt became more densely populated, as traffic became a common headache, and public transportation was insufficient. These failures became part and parcel of the Egyptian urban experience, and the song served as an anthem to the unfulfilled promises of Egyptian nationalism.

Ahmed Adawiya is considered the first of dozens of artists from the lower working class to reimagine the genre of *sha’abi* music. This new *sha’abi* music shocked many listeners with its break from tradition, gaining a large following as it spoke to the socioeconomic conditions of the period. Common themes in popular *sha’abi* songs included not only the usual tales of love and longing but also of frustration and despair, addressing poverty, economic disparity, and inequality in contemporary Egyptian life. On top of that, these songs were performed in very localized, colloquial Egyptian dialects of Arabic, unheard of at the time for more formal Egyptian music and films. This in part reflected the artists and audience—members of the urban working class were creating this music, and they were singing for *sha’abi* communities.

Several factors in this period can help explain the prevailing themes of despair over injustice and inequality evident in these songs. Scholars have cited the frustration following the abject failure of Egypt and the Arab states in the 1967 war with Israel; the letdown of Arab socialism under Nasser and the subsequent stumbling of “de-Nasserization,” and the *infitah* instituted by Sadat as catalyzing the birth of this musical genre. *Sha’abi* songs’ main lyrical themes of socioeconomic frustration and economic inequality, articulated in colloquial dialects

considered vulgar by cultural elite, convey important realities that the period's subaltern Egyptian working class communities experienced—realities that, before this time, were not addressed in popular cultural expressions of Egyptianness. With the arrival of the cassette tape and the relative ease of making pirated copies, it was introduced to larger public discourse.

CULTURAL PRODUCTION FOR AND ABOUT THE SHA'ABI BEFORE THE 1970S

Pop music in Egypt existed before sha'abi music, although it served a different purpose. Defining national cultural heritage in popular culture has historically been central in forging Egyptian national identity, both pre-British independence and during the Arab nationalist era that began with Gamal Abdel Nasser's presidency. At the turn of the twentieth century, knowing Egyptian colloquial dialect became essential for broad public consumption of printed media, political cartoons and commentary, theatrical productions, nationalist songs, and folklore. To foster a cohesive national identity, according to Ziad Fahmy, "these [nationalist] ideas had to be reworked, reconstructed, and transformed into a form that was meaningful to local Egyptian milieux, and equally, they had to be in a language everyone understood." Distributing forms of mass media outlined a national identity in which one of the focal points was the use of Egyptian colloquial—particularly the Cairene--dialect. These initial idiomatic cultural expressions espoused a unified Egyptian national identity, what it meant to be Egyptian while the country was occupied by Britain, and has further developed its identity in the years after independence.

As the radio became a "central institution in Cairo's musical life," many of the Egyptian radio stations that emerged in the 1920s were subsequently nationalized in the 1930s. During the Nasser era, music and cinema often centered themes around what it means to be Egyptian, and espoused forms of Egyptianness that were perceived to be "modern," thus complementing modernizing state projects like the Aswan Dam and the nationalization of the Suez Canal. As sha'abi music rose to popularity in the 1970s, it spoke against the empty promises of Egyptian nationalism and modernism, the failures of which were painfully obvious to urban dwellers living in poverty. In this sense, sha'abi music was an anti-modernist cultural expression of Egyptianness by urban working class—a demographic that was either denigrated, obscured, or romanticized, depending on previous expressions of nationalist identity.

As far back as the late nineteenth-century, *awlad al balad*—"sons of the nation," the sha'abi's precursor—had a negative connotation in high Egyptian public discourse, although this began to change in post-1952 Egypt. The concept of *awlad al balad* carried different, context-dependent meanings. In nationalist discourse, *awlad al balad* was at the forefront of formulating an "authentic" Egyptianness. On another level, *awlad balad* also connoted an unruly, uneducated population of *ghalaba*—those that do not know better. The paradoxical glorification of the indigenous, working Egyptian, both rural and urban, under Nasser's reign was the base of the nationalist narrative of building an independent, self-sufficient nation. This classist lens of viewing *awlad al balad* continued into Sadat's rule:

it could mean native Egyptian identity in some contexts, particularly when the state attempted to conjure nationalist sentiment by appealing to the lower classes; in others, the uneducated unruly masses that used coarse language. Sha'abi music, along with the communities that produced it, was looked down on by producers of high culture, e.g., music and film created within the centralized, regulated apparatus of the state which had certain ideas about sophistication and what music should and should not be. One only needs to compare some of Umm Kulthum's most well-known songs, in standardized Cairene dialect with sophisticated lyrics addressing traditional themes of loss, to the socioeconomic issues brought to the fore.

THE INFITAH, SHA'ABI IDENTITY, AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Adawiya's music, and sha'abi music more broadly, also coincided with the proliferation of portable music players, cassettes, and the decentralization of institutions that produced popular culture. A university student in 1977 living in Roushdy, a middle-class neighborhood in Alexandria, recalled playing Ahmed Adawiya songs on her cassette player even though her elderly neighbor chided her, believing it to be too base for a student in the prestigious field of engineering. But while the music was initially considered too low-class for radio, by the late 1970s, large cross sections of urban Egypt had heard of Ahmed Adawiya and were likely to have heard his music in a market or taxi.

Several factors led to the spread of sha'abi music. In *Egypt, the Stalled Society*, Hamied

Ansari shows that the infitah "gave rise to a nouveau riche... consisting of middlemen, commissionagents, and comprador merchants who thrived off of imported goods." The increasingly visible wealth of this small, elite class accentuated economic inequality for the urban working class. Other elements of "de-Nasserization"—particularly land de-sequestration beginning in the early 1970s concurrently with the infitah—significantly contributed to placating the elites and further alienating the lower classes. A new capitalist class emerged among the country's elite that was strongly connected to the government. As Tarek Osman notes, "the regime used the new economic opportunities to build its own power base to reward its cronies and allies."

This process was not without strife: workers' unions across the country rebelled against the state's refusal to accommodate the increased cost of living, and steelworkers in Helwan and textile workers in Alexandria held strikes in the mid-1970s. The state later impounded funds of the largest union in the country, the General Union of Egyptian Workers, as a way to subdue worker unrest. Even public institutions became increasingly marginalized, leaving educated workers with meager salaries and a stagnant public sector. This economic malaise culminated in the Food Riots of 1977, a nationwide uprising in cities against the proposed cuts to food subsidies. This social and economic exclusion became a significant part of public consciousness, and it was evident not only in sha'abi music but in popular films and TV series that attracted scores of viewers. The state's economic policies were failing the vast majority of Egyptians, creating a

space—previously absent in formal cultural productions—for alternative expressions of Egyptianness and the experience of being an urban, working class Egyptian to proliferate.

The music industry was becoming increasingly decentralized as a result of the Sadat's open door reforms. The proliferation of the cassette tape and cassette player made sha'abi songs incredibly accessible and were played in taxis, minibuses, and market stalls in working-class neighborhoods. With the ease of duplicating copies of cassette tapes with two-cassette players, making several copies to distribute was common. The cassette tape was a cheap medium to record and distribute sha'abi music to consumers since it made music increasingly portable and easy to acquire. Sha'abi music in this era was the background of a working-class commuter's soundscape in their daily ride in a microbus, taxi, or when running errands at the market. Consumers could increasingly relate to the experiences they heard in these everyday ventures.

Even as Egyptians from various social groups were consuming this music, the negative association with the lower working class dancing to such music at weddings and festivals endured. Music produced from within is backward, unsophisticated, and "inauthentic" Egyptian music. Both in terms of distribution and in some of the prevailing themes of the experiences of inequality and despair, the infitah catalyzed changes in cultural production amid increasing inflation, the gradual erasure of the middle class, and a widening gap between the elite and lower classes.

THE SHA'AB REPRESENT THEMSELVES

By the 1990s, sha'abi-produced culture had become more acceptable, and sha'abi artists like Hakim were broadcasted on Egyptian TV and radio. The change in pop culture continues in Egypt, as accessibility to media—both consumption and creation—has increased drastically since the 1970s, giving rise to a new type of sha'abi music.

Today's techno-sha'abi music—or *mahraganat* as it is popularly called, referencing music played at festivals and weddings—is reminiscent of Western rap and techno. It bears a strong presence of autotune. The slang employed by today's sha'abi singers is even deeper than that of its musical precursors. Producing music is even easier, outdoing the impact of the cassette tape, as artists use pirated software and can find beats for free on the internet; easily upload songs on YouTube and SoundCloud, and share them on social media—all of which have contributed to grassroots distribution networks for a sha'abi music.

Like its sha'abi predecessor, the elite often chides mahraganat for being profane, lewd, and, in short, only fit for the lower class. Many popular songs do indeed have themes that are too profane, and sometimes too sexually explicit for the radio. They also include more overt sociopolitical undertones increasingly, often speaking against the way that they speak against state discourses about the lower class. For instance, Sadat and Fifty, two of the first popular mahragan artists as the genre was emerging a few years ago, released songs that speak to the experience of lower, working-class Egyptian while dispelling common stereotypes. In

one song, they speak out against sexual harassment and patriarchal norms with lyrics like ["masculinity is up to me."](#) Asserting masculinity, and what it means to be a working-class Egyptian man is a common theme in mahraganat.

In one of the most potent examples of this, Sadat, "3laa2 Fifty," and "Felo" collaborated in 2014 to release the song "Ana" or "Me." They sing, "I am the kid in the alley, I am 'culture' and 'civilization,' I am the kid who is throwing a *toob* from the highest floor of my apartment building. I am the son of factory-workers. I am a 'lost cause,' a loser." They juxtapose buzzwords often used in nationalistic state discourses—"culture," "civilization"—with "son of factory

workers." They reclaim familiar refrains in which the Egyptian state blames the lower classes for economic stagnation, political instability, and lack of public safety.

Now more than ever, sha'abi music is a mode of expression, not only in an overtly political sense but also in the lived experience of the marginalized working class. This is one of the ways working-class Egyptians have long been exercising their own agency. Even as their music has begun to be [been co-opted by mainstream pop culture](#), local sha'abi artists continue the legacy that Ahmed Adawiya started: expressing themselves on their own terms, and harnessing the DIY and grassroots ethics of their sha'abi forebearers. 🌟

All translations are done by the author.

SADNESS ST.

MOHAMED KHALID

To be happy, you must experience sadness.
We need to learn to be sad
in order to know and appreciate
happiness in our life;
or else be numb and unaware.

As a country, have we experienced enough sadness to have
a happiness street? Or have I, on the country's behalf?





SAQF

FARRAH FRAY & AHMED DREBIKA

I remember my brother used to climb onto the roof
Whenever the satellite wasn't working
My mother would wait until she was completely sure
Afraid to waste his time
But he found it fun, loved to climb
Sometimes my cousins would hold the ladder for him,
Other times he liked feeling the wall against his skin

Her face would shift between laughter and horror as she watched
But he'd always make her laugh,
The way charming boys do

One day our neighbour's son was hit by a stray bullet
He had climbed over the grapevines to watch a wedding
And my mother had a hard time saying that it would have been
better if he fell
Or if there was no wedding at all
Or that no one picked fruits anyways,

But his mother still watered the grapes
And spoke about his eyes, which were the colour of dates
Under the sun,
Would answer every stray text
Or better still, joke with other women about death.

Poem by Farrah Fray. Photo (left) by Ahmed Drebiika.

ROTATING CHAIR

SULTAN AL RAMAHI

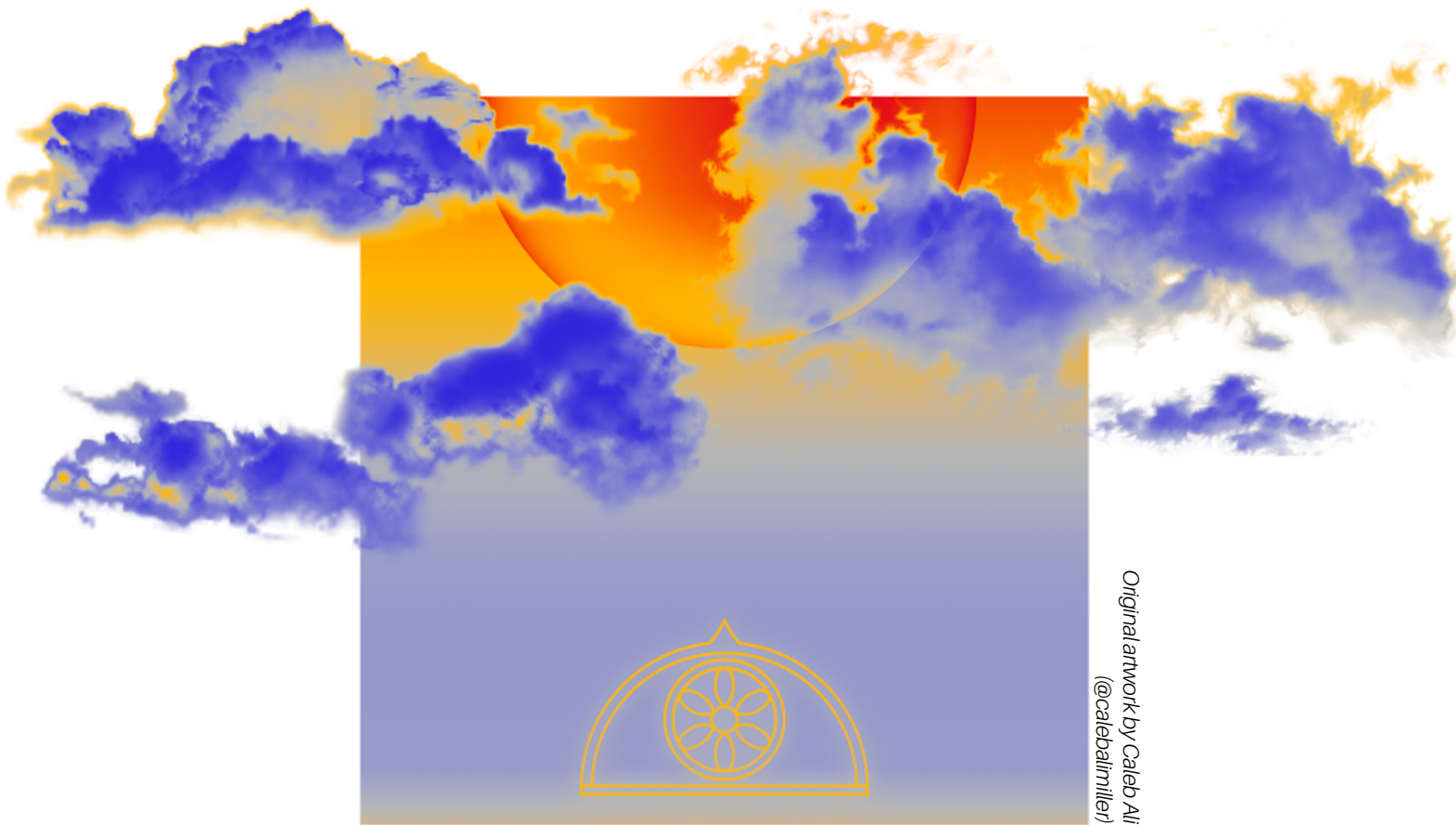
The same characters appear again and again, in one way or another, until we don't know who's killing, occupying, oppressing, or stealing from us.





POETIC JUSTICE?

RACHEL FURLOW



NEW GROUPS ARE COOPTING YEMEN'S POETIC TRADITION
TO STRENGTHEN THEIR POLITICAL MESSAGING

IN 2011, Yemen was hit hard by the wave of regional revolutions. Those calling for the fall of the Ali Abdullah Saleh regime frequently invoked traditional poetry in their protests. By appropriating verse, anti-government groups could persuade fellow citizens of their allegedly legitimate relation to traditional Yemeni values. Even Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Yemen's local branch of Al Qaeda, has taken advantage of the seemingly inherent sense of cultural authority that poetry can convey in the country by using the medium to spread its message across much of eastern Yemen. Poetry's political legitimacy stems mainly from its traditional use in tribal mediation—a long history in the territory now known as modern Yemen. Especially now in the face of civil conflict, the country suffers from a corrupt and unreliable justice system, which has caused the population to rely increasingly on these local mediation processes. Verse used in them is linked to the political in

Yemeni daily life: many see the judicial and political systems in Yemeni tribal territories as intertwined. Due to Yemen's long poetic tradition, certain types and uses of poetry have been established as inherently Yemeni.

As Yemen's civil war drags on and the fault lines between government forces and the Houthi rebels (among many other groups with political aims) deepen each day, poetry becomes a stronger tool for groups vying for authority in the eyes of the population.

POETRY IN DAILY YEMENI LIFE

While countries such as Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon were the frontline of *Al Nahda* (cultural renaissance) in the 20th century and were able to disseminate their literature across the Arab world, Yemen's political divisions and economic stagnation kept the nation in a state of relative cultural isolation. As a result, the works of many Levantine and North African poets eclipsed the work of their southern neighbors.

Before the mid-twentieth century, poetry in Yemen was passed down almost exclusively through oral recitation. The challenge to tracking and documenting specific poetic trends pre-1960 is mainly due to lack of written records. Beginning in the 1960s, however, it became popular to record poetry recitations on audio cassette tapes. Although radio broadcasts of poetry recitation existed before this proliferation of cassette recordings, anthropologist W. Flagg Miller explains that tapes—relatively inexpensive compared to the cost of radio technology—facilitated wide access to poetry. These cassettes often allowed poets to escape government regulation and censorship, birthing a more political, or at least critical, theme to Yemeni verse. These

themes, writes Miller in *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media*, emerged in the poetic verses used by tribal members in the Yemeni Arab Spring protests.

The communities in which poetry recitation is most common are primarily rural towns in the northwestern highlands and southeastern plains, which have the lowest levels of literacy in the nation. Its popularity among the Yemeni people is far greater than that of poetry in other Arab countries. For instance, Elisabeth Kendall, a renowned literary scholar and Yemen expert, found that 74% of 2,000 Yemenis [surveyed in 2012](#) felt that poetry was either 'important' or 'very important' in their current culture. A [similar survey](#) that Kendall conducted in 2011 found that only 6% of Egyptians read or listen to poetry on a regular basis.

VERSE IN THE TRIBAL CONTEXT

Yemen has always been, and remains, one of the region's most tribal nations.* Yemen's diverse tribes have often played a unifying role in a country that has had consistently weak national political structures. Since the unification of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and the Yemen Arab Republic—in the south and north, respectively—in 1990, the government of the unified Republic of Yemen under Ali Abdullah Saleh co-opted tribal structures as patronage networks to ensure stability and exploit their popular traditions among the Yemeni people. This political strategy of 'divide and rule' further deepened tensions among various groups in the country, strengthening tribal identities over a unified national identity.

Although there are differing traits, customs, and political goals of tribes across Yemen,

there do exist unifying characteristics, including the use of poetry in ritual and daily life. Rather than a simple literary pastime, poetry and its recitation in these regions is a ‘constitutive social practice’ performed at conflict mediations, weddings, funerals, and other social gatherings. This can take the form of a single recitation by one poet, a verse mediation from the tribal sheikh, or *bid’ wa jiwab* (call and response) between various poets. The three main categories of verse in Yemen are the *qasidah*, *zamil*, and *balah*, all of which take different forms and address separate themes. The *qasidah* is the most well-known outside the country, as it most often addresses political issues and is the only genre that is consistently recorded through writing. *Zamil* and *balah* poetry are, on the other hand, most often spontaneous and performed in a ritualistic manner.

Zamil poetry is the style preferred during rituals of conflict mediation—the most popular venues for recitation in tribal contexts. Such mediation is a crucial aspect of *urf* (customary law) in Yemen. Due to the failures of Yemen’s national judiciary system, customary law is often perceived as a more reliable way to resolve disputes in most areas, especially the northwestern and southeastern regions. Focused on addressing antagonisms between local communities, tribal law avoids the punitive, coercive character of institutionalized law. The ceremony of customary law is not a trial, but rather arbitration by the tribal sheikh between the opposing parties. Each party presents oral arguments. Rather than a speech, the sheikh will often compose his final decision in verse. Due to the elevated moral status and rhetorical power that this verse holds, writes Miller, it is a more suitable medium than normal speech for reconciliation.

A common issue at these mediations is that of land ownership. The following excerpts are from a poem recited after the mediation of a land ownership conflict in the governorate of Mahra in southeastern Yemen:

*Atop the peak of Tarbūt // at the place of the paths
of the winds // when they blow furiously and are
joined together.*

*Sometimes (there comes) the sea breeze // between
the stars of Dōḡer and Rbē // (when) the first
season has come [or finished, lit. “happened”].
Now I’ll compose a habbōt // atop a well-crafted
melody // if the rhymes fit together.*

*Now the tribal arbiters // have smoothed the
wood of its roughness // and even the obdurate is
satisfied.*

*The tribesman doesn’t hold forever to his position
// unless he has seen to his non-tribal dependents
// and his column and then he carries them on his
upper back.*

*I beseech the Heavens // after the fury has quieted
down // and the owner has had his property
restored.*

*And the landowner whirls a flag over head //
calling to every channel in the wādī // and (even)
the one living high above desires (to respond) in
earnestness.*

Powerful natural imagery symbolizes the conflict at hand and its mediation process. Through these images, writes Kendall, the sheikh harkens back to the pre-Islamic period of poetry in the Arab world. Such imagery transcends the barrier between the earthly and the spiritual or religious, conveying religious authority. In *Metaphors of Commerce*, Miller explains that a less orthodox tradition holds that poetic words come from God. More common are metaphors and symbols linking speech to natural processes. “*Al-ashja’r tathmar wa-l-qabīlī min kalimatuh*” (as

the trees bear fruit, so the tribesman holds to his word). Strong words are often depicted as thunder, storms, or even destructive floods, while amorous words are a fragrant zephyr or rustling breeze. Nature, then, bestows historical and religious legitimacy on the sheikh and the decision resulting from his mediation.

As Yemen’s political and judicial institutions continue to erode, the tribal structure and its accompanying customs remain central in daily life. As a result, poetry plays a larger role than that of other artistic media. Since the time of the 2011 uprisings that ousted long-time ruler Ali Abdullah Saleh, various groups within Yemen have attempted to take advantage of the cachet of verse in order to advance their own message and gain sympathy from the general population, with varying degrees of success.

POETRY’S REVOLUTION

Art has been well-documented as an impactful medium during the 2011 uprisings that swept the Middle East, ranging from film to graffiti to rap music. Poetry was no exception. In Tunisia, Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabi’s poem ‘[Will to Live](#)’ was the soundtrack to many of the Tunisian protests, as the following lines were sung on the streets, scrawled across banners, and even spoken on television during the broadcast that declared the end of the rule of Tunisian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali:

*If one day, a people desire to live,
then fate will answer their call,
And their night will then begin to fade,
and their chains break and fall.*

The rhythms of chants heard on the streets were influenced by poetic tradition. [Lines](#) like ‘*Ya*

Mubarak! Ya Mubarak! Is-Sa’udiyya fi-ntizarak!’ (“Mubarak, O Mubarak, Saudi Arabia awaits!”) or ‘*Idrab idrab ya Habib, mahma tadrab mish hansib!*’ (Hit us, beat us, O Habib, hit all you want—we’re not going to leave!) are arranged in the pattern of poetic couplets, as catchy as they are witty.

This trend was just as prevalent, if not more so, in Yemen’s revolution to oust long-time ruler Ali Abdullah Saleh. Steven Caton, who studied tribal poetry in northern Yemeni tribes during the 1980s, [writes](#) of watching the 2011 protests in Ta’iz and Sana’a,

“

The degree to which the tribes of Yemen were part of these revolutionary events is one of the great stories of this period, and it has yet to be told... It was stunning to hear the poetry I had studied more than thirty years earlier being chanted loud and clear in the protest marches... Tribal poetry, far from being squashed politically, has turned out to be perhaps the voice of the Yemeni revolution.

“

When Yemeni tribes showed up en masse to city centers across the country—whether in support or opposition to then-President Saleh—many protest slogans centered around their political poetry, developed in the past decade. As early as Johanna Ihle’s 2009 documentary [Men of Words](#), shot north of the city of Aden, Yemenis can be heard reciting poetry as a warning to the government: If grievances are not addressed, there will be an uprising among the population.

As protesters camped out in Sana’a’s “Change Square” in the winter of 2011, poets migrated between tents to recite verses of politically

charged poems. Although many of their audiences were in large part tribal, poetic themes more often emphasized a Yemeni identity. One such poem, [The Land of Yemen, Its People Revolted](#), evokes a national convergence:

*Tell our government I have a new one
Injustice has crossed the line, and the land of
Yemen, it's a nation revolting
We are here to tell you to leave, we are here to say
Saleh leave
Listen to me, don't be stupid and dialogue will not
work with us
Listen to my advice and obey, no we will not fear
your bombs
Even if machine guns rain
This is an order you must obey, your people
command and you must obey.*

This is just one of many examples of how political poetry spread from tribal members to other revolutionary groups. Yemeni poet Ibtisam al-Mutawakkil [explains](#),

“

Yemeni society is still an aural society. For this reason, the spirited rhythm and phrases move the people... In the history of the Arab revolutions, poets have always been at the forefront of awareness leading the revolutionary action, and this action is still present in Yemen today as it was since the revolutions of 1962 and 1963.

“

Poetry's use as a tool of persuasion and conflict mediation has extended from the tribal sphere to the national. As the country operated without the sense of a true national identity, the Yemeni tribal character, communicated in verse under the protesters' banner, became a unifying force for much of the population.

THE BARDS OF AL QAEDA

The 2011 protestors have not been the only ones to recognize poetry's mobilizing power. In the eastern provinces of Yemen, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) retains significant influence and various patches of territory. As the Yemeni civil war drags on and the erosion of the infrastructure of southern Yemen devastates the population, AQAP has been able to recruit new members and win loyalty through the distribution of goods and services. In addition to these patronage networks, AQAP's extensive propaganda projects target specific parts of Yemeni society. AQAP's media channel—Al Malahem—consists of a bi-monthly Arabic language magazine as well as the infamous Inspire, an English language periodical touting AQAP's ideology and recent attacks.

Sandwiched between praise for 'lone wolf' attacks in the West and instructions on how to detonate pressure-cooker bombs, poetry playing to both the emotions of the audience and AQAP's core ideology dominates the page. Respect for verse, especially in AQAP's target recruitment areas in the tribal southeast, facilitates processes of indoctrination or radicalization.

AQAP's propaganda poetry also uses natural imagery to evoke the divine. A March 2009 periodical featured this poem extolling martyrdom:

*I will fasten my explosive belt,
I will shudder like a lightening bolt
and rush by like a torrential stream
and resound like stormy thunder.
In my heart is the heart of a volcano.
I will sweep through the land like a flood.*

Although not composed in traditional verse form—according to Kendall, only 11% of poems published al-Malahem are – the poem still conveys historical legitimacy through its ties to classical poetry's use of natural parallels to human emotion. Not only that, its composition also takes a classically religious format.

Besides frequent interjections of what AQAP interprets as Allah's will or plan, most poems encouraging jihadists are also vocalized, meaning they include short vowel marks. Although formal Arabic always contains short vowels marks within the structure of the word, vowels are often only written out in the most formal of settings. The most recognized example of written short vowels is the Qu'ran. By mimicking the structure of the Qu'ran, writes Kendall, AQAP's poetry can boast religious legitimacy.

In Spring 2012 Al Malahem media disseminated *In Remembrance of Usama*—an anthology of Osama bin Laden's essays and poems from his time as a leader in Al Qaeda. Several pages featured collections of his poetry – recorded in cassette tapes – that utilized natural images and historical or religious references present in AQAP's poetry. By portraying bin Laden as a bard, AQAP drew a direct parallel to him as a local leader, similar to sheikhs who compose poems to conduct tribal mediations.

AQAP also uses verse in their online recruitment videos. In a recent video, posted on June 15, Khalid Saeed Batarfi—a senior member of AQAP and often the face of the organization online—finishes his address with a fourteen-line poem in classical form, discussing the situation in Syria and the necessity of jihad against the West. By mimicking the Qu'ran in written poems and also producing oral recitations of jihadist verse, AQAP capitalizes on poetry's deep connection to the Yemeni social imagination.

The powerful, authoritative aura that poetry has acquired from Yemen's religious, political, and cultural past plays an important role in the AQAP's ability to recruit new members and win the hearts and minds of the Yemeni population. Conveying these persuasive messages in a medium that is still extremely popular among Yemenis today only further adds to the validity of AQAP's standing in the eyes of the populace.

The power of the poem, though often more associated with Shakespeare than the Arab Spring among those in the West, should not be underestimated nor relegated solely to literary studies or anthropology. Wielding the power of poetry, jihadists and liberal revolutionaries alike can sway public opinion. To either counter this new wave of jihadist propaganda or simply better understand the culture of one of the Middle East's most forgotten countries, we should be listening to the poets, not just the politicians. ●

* There are conflicting views of what constitutes tribal identity and, therefore, what it means to be part of a tribe. This article mainly focuses on tribal status when referring to tribal affiliation or membership and how it defines social standing in Yemeni society. For a counterargument, see Abdulghani al-Iryani's views in [Al Jazeera](#).

DEAR DEERAH

SHOUG SAGUR

These pictures were taken in Deerah, Riyadh, in the heart of Saudi Arabia's capital, a historical place. I wanted to show people— young people especially—that our country is worth discovering. There's more than massive malls or cafes to hang out at. There's beauty, stories deserving more attention, abandoned by locals. Why is it so weird for me to walk these streets? Why does every foreign person who passes by me look surprised that I'm here? *Didn't Saudis leave these places?* We need to search more, to save our culture from vanishing. We should be proud of our identity.





TEHRAN STREETSTYLE

HODA KATEBI

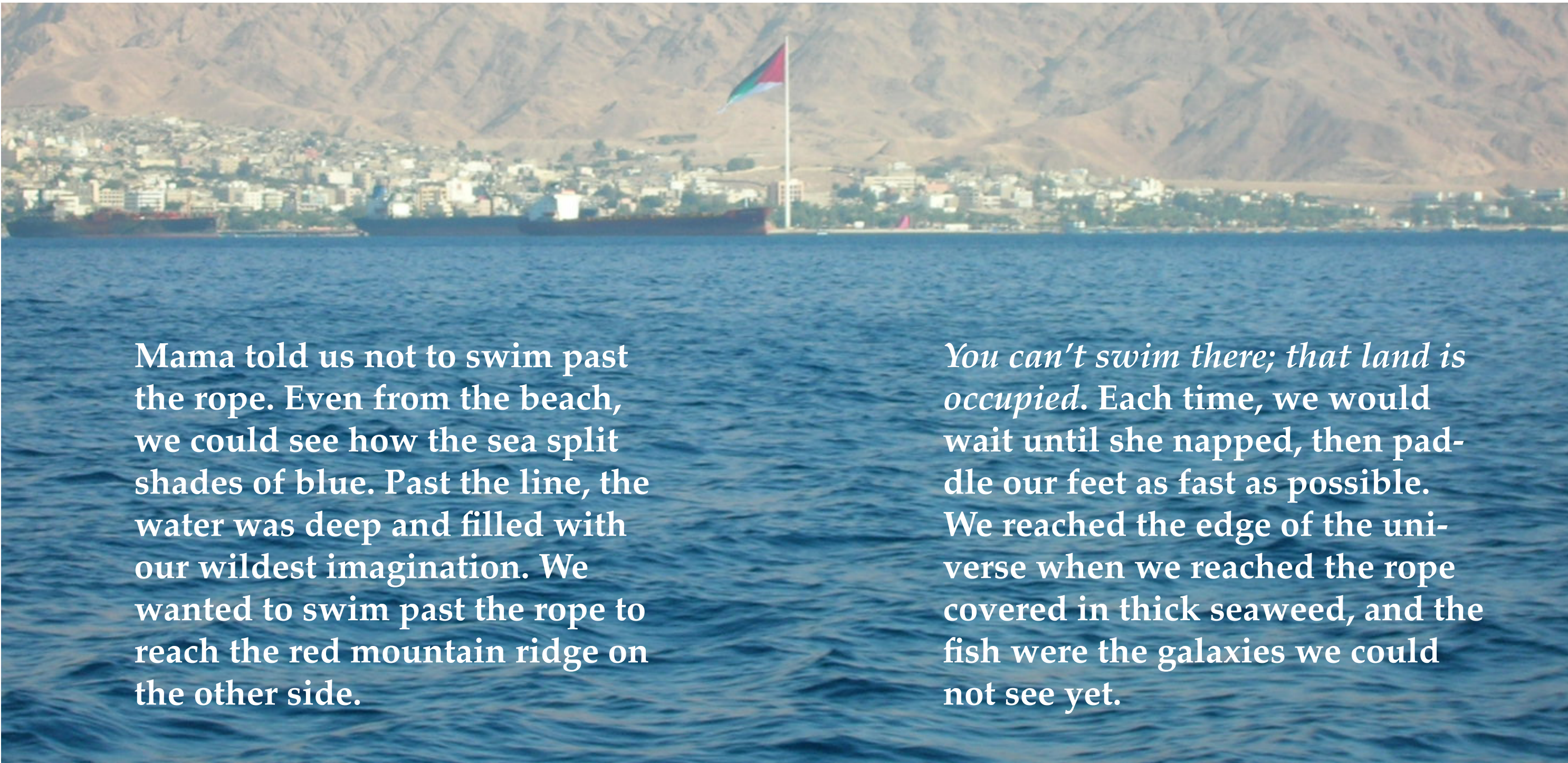
Tehran Streetstyle is a project of radical identity reclamation through fashion and portraiture. The colors, fabrics, aesthetics, architecture, faces, shoes, and textures photographed that make up the identities of young Iranian men and women are unedited, unfiltered, and unapologetic.

I chose fashion as the language for this project because of its powerful communicative properties: clothing is a universal language of self-expression, power, culture, and political tensions that can be communicated across people, cultures, and borders.

My work documenting illegal fashion in Iran is more than just celebrating the aesthetic value of fashion. It's about reclaiming my identity as a Muslim-Iranian woman and challenging political realities here and abroad.







Mama told us not to swim past the rope. Even from the beach, we could see how the sea split shades of blue. Past the line, the water was deep and filled with our wildest imagination. We wanted to swim past the rope to reach the red mountain ridge on the other side.

AQABA

HAMZA BILBEISI

You can't swim there; that land is occupied. Each time, we would wait until she napped, then paddle our feet as fast as possible. We reached the edge of the universe when we reached the rope covered in thick seaweed, and the fish were the galaxies we could not see yet.

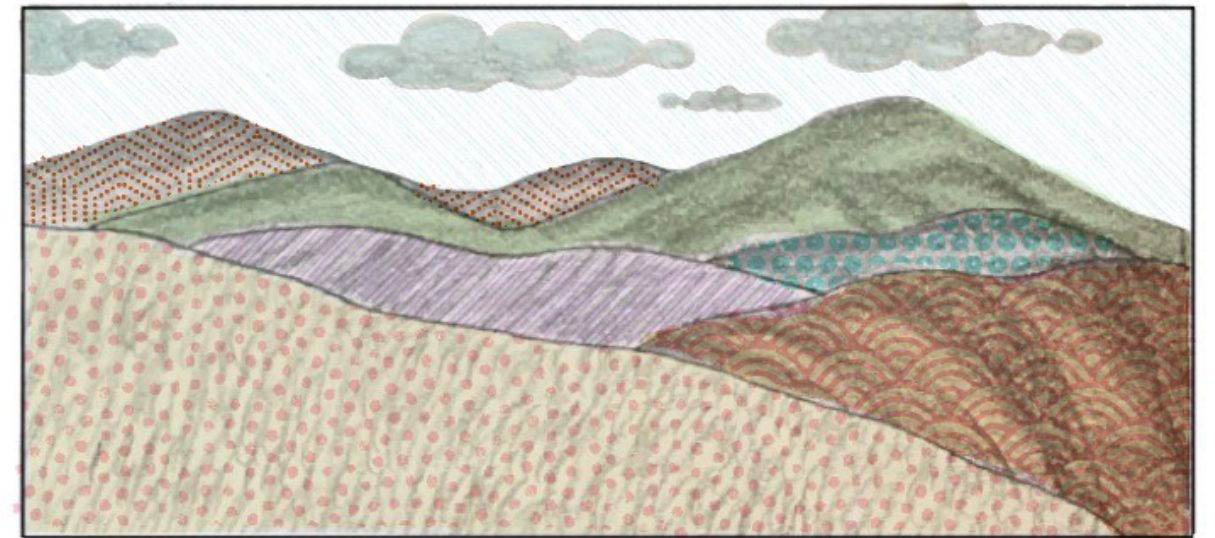
WILDFLOWERS

DILAN ARSLAN

I am a Zaza Kurd, and my ancestors have lived in this village in Sivas, Turkey for hundreds of years.

I immigrated to Canada from Turkey when I was six years old and whenever I return home to my motherland, I go on long strolls and collect wildflowers.

I do this to remind myself that being an immigrant also makes me a wildflower—for I too am resilient, beautiful, and free.

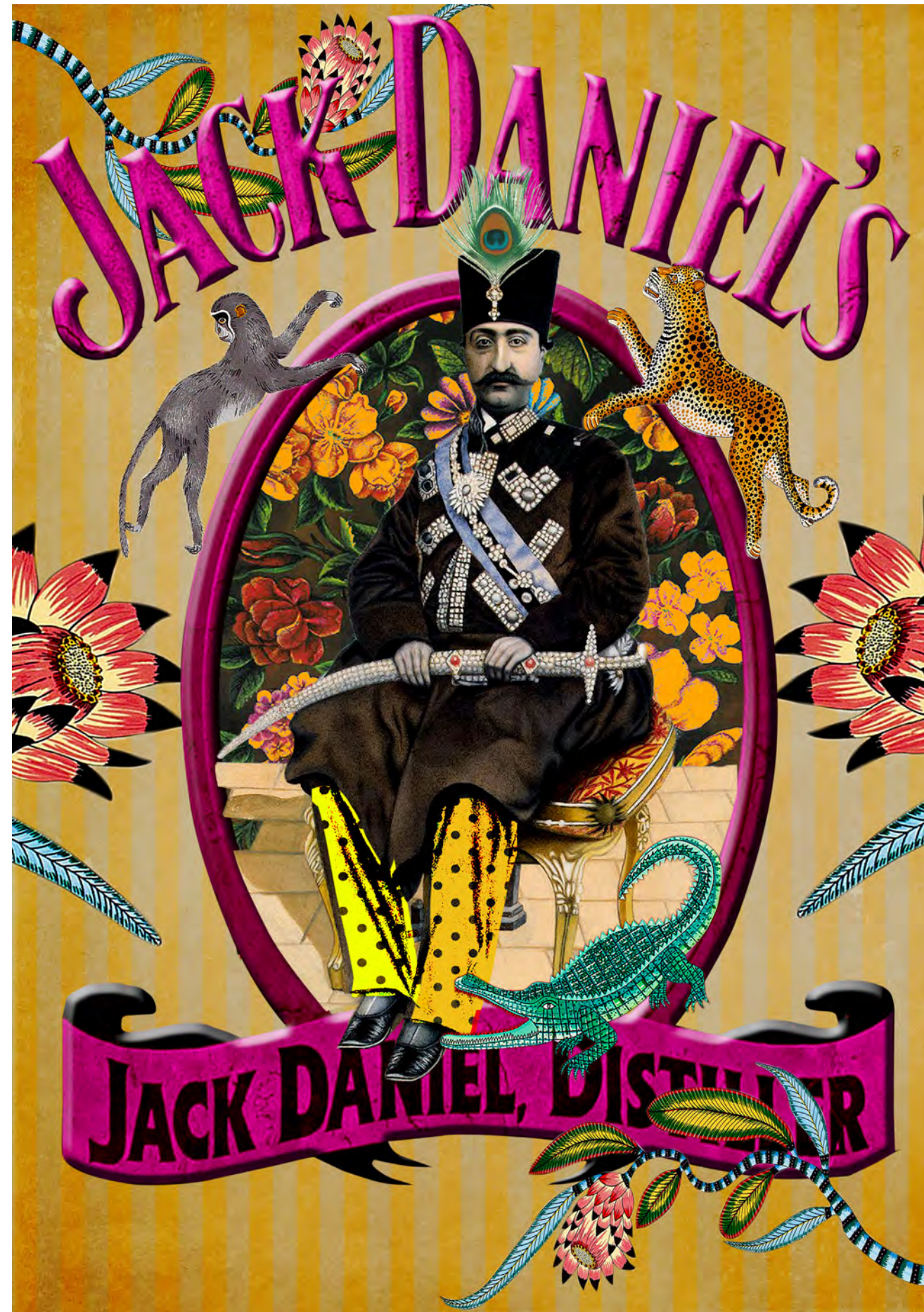


LEGENDS AND HEROES

ZAINA EL SAID

I come from a mixed background. From the North Caucasus and Mesopotamia, reared in the Middle East and educated in Europe and Russia. My upbringing was divided between a tribal/military atmosphere, and artists and designers. My artwork followed a similar pattern: a central character, a hero or authority, leads the work and is interwoven within a story of patterns, ideas, architecture and details that belong to completely different origins. I focus on creating harmony through differences, and oneness from contrast of color and ideas to convey the importance of transcending divisions if one is to focus on beauty.

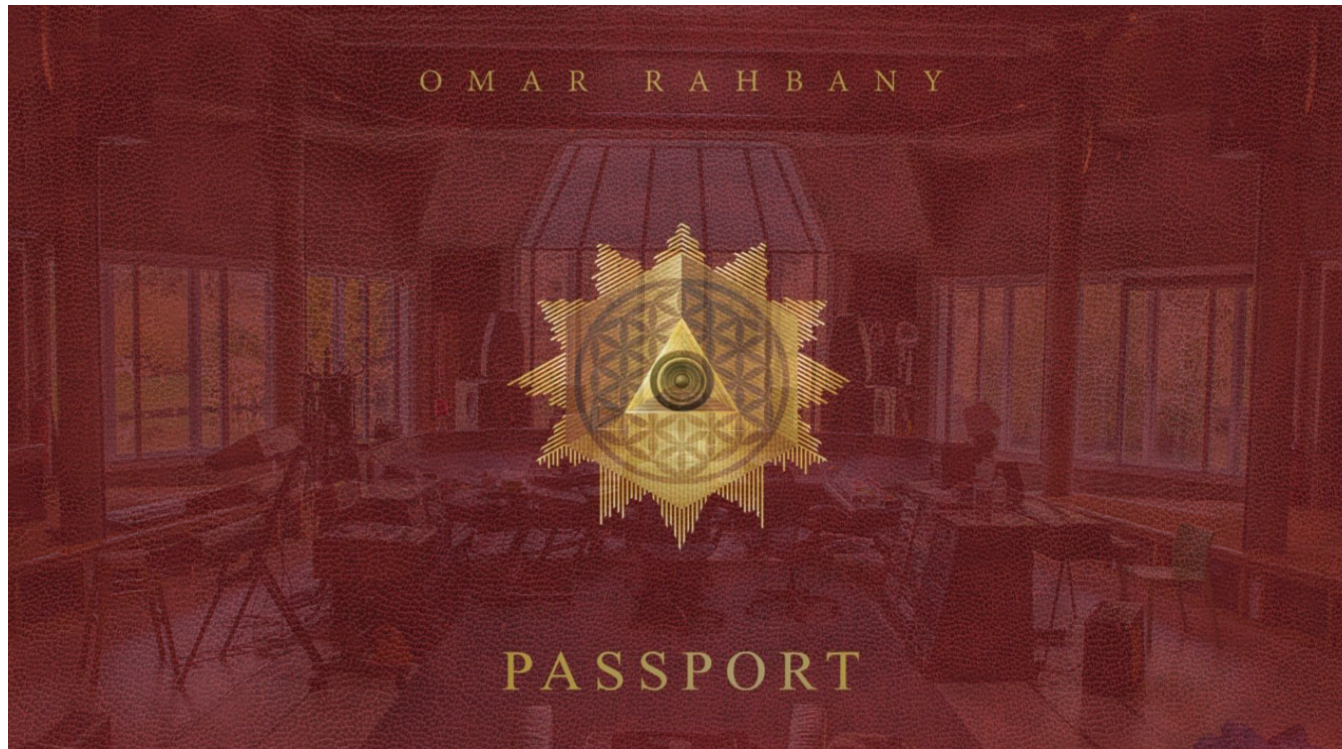




IN SEARCH OF A PASSPORT

CEEM HAIDAR

Passport's album artwork overlaid with photo of Omar Rahbany in his home studio. All photos courtesy of Omar Rahbany, Ceem Haidar, and The Commery.



OMAR RAHBANY'S LATEST ALBUM EMBODIES THE CHAOS OF IDENTITY.

ALLOW me to share with you a story that pertains to a loss, says 27-year-old musician and composer Omar Rahbany.

I was at school, at the age of fifteen, seated in French class, and our teacher began the lesson with these words: "We should be proud to be Phoenicians, we invented the alphabet, we excelled at business, and we spread our culture to the world."

Throughout the semester, she couldn't help but express her love and pride to be Phoenician at every possible opportunity. I found that I was easily manipulated

by her hypnotic voice. I took hold of this notion, and became proud to be Phoenician.

A few days later, Professor Fares, our Arabic teacher—who looked like a true Arabic knight straight out of a children's storybook—went on another tangent about living in what I call 'declamation mode.' For him, without the shadow of a doubt, we are Arabs. And seeing him act with an unparalleled level of confidence, I was easily convinced to believe the same.

But I was in a Catholic Totalitarian school, and so our identity had to have traces of Christian teachings.

This was confirmed when Father Emmanuel said: "Good people, we are first and foremost Christians!"

Period.

Diplomacy was not evident in this statement, but it was one that most of us in school could agree with.

Then one day, our geography teacher came into class. He was also keen to influence our minds and identities. He proclaimed: "We are Not Phoenicians, Not Arabs, Not Christians, we are Lebanese and our force comes from the Cedars."

I recall that on that day students suddenly transformed from football lovers into enthusiastic patriotic civil servants, ready to shed blood for their nation.

Story after story, my now skeptical mind realized that it was easy for any charismatic speaker to convince us of anything.

With so many to latch on to, I left the class feeling lost.

There was only one man who could put an end to this internal conflict. Our history teacher.

I looked for him, searching around the campus, and then finally found him. He was kneeling down, anxiously looking for something on the floor.

"Sir, anything I can help you with?" I asked.

He replied: "Omar, I have been looking for my ID card all day long but I still haven't found it. It looks like I have lost my identity." His last sentence rung like huge cathedral bells on a crowded Sunday morning mass.

I said to myself, "not only sir, have you lost your identity card, but a whole generation are indeed lost with this question of identity."

...

When we first met, in May of 2016, Omar's wide smile showcased the upper row of his teeth, shining through his untamed hair and stubble. An observant stare peered at me over the rims of his dark rectangular glasses, melding well with his casual attire and air. He was looking for someone he could trust to help convey the complex vision contained within his first album, 'Passport,' which he hoped to present to a global audience. Admittedly, he struggled with staged human interaction—part of the reason why he reached out to me to launch events and press interviews. He kept placing his iPhone on the office table, picking it up and putting it back down throughout, shaking his leg repetitively, and glancing around, assessing the space.

Throughout our meetings, it became apparent to me that Omar knew music so well that, sometimes, he even saw musical notes in the world around him. As a result, though, he hadn't taken the time to brush up on other skills that he found to be less important, such as being diplomatically correct—which was necessary for general social interactions. He also had the habit of incessantly questioning his identity, and while he thought about this often, he hardly cared to elaborate verbally on the matter. He said what he needed to say, and then otherwise observed.

He remained cautious in our first few encounters. He shared only small parts of 'Passport,' as though testing the waters to see if I could understand the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' of the album—a German concept meaning 'a total work of art.'

Every now and then, he would switch on his iPad and play the [album trailer](#) as a sort of explanation; it never failed to inspire. He was the kind of guy who was hands on with every piece of information that had to do with him or his work, dictating it word for word, frame by frame, if he needed to



Omar Rahbany (left) with Steve Rodby (center) and Mahdi Yahya (right).

(which in most cases, he did), reflecting his talent in composition. His attention span remained short, but he always guided the conversation by referencing a to-do list on his iPhone, which he pulled close to his face to bring into focus.

...

After a few challenging introductory meetings, plans to launch 'Passport' in Beirut in October of 2016 were underway.

Our meetings sometimes spanned two to three hours, but always ended abruptly. Omar candidly shared personal stories about his childhood, family, and the community he was born into. He did not care to filter the information he shared, sometimes smiling passionately, other times grinning—perhaps thinking of something completely off topic—or frowning, growing angry. His hand gestures always mimicked his emotions.

One of the most crucial stories Omar shared was of the source of his talent. While his professional debut is recent, his craft predates his own birth. "My father forced my mother to continue her piano lessons so I would hear it in the womb," he divulged. After all, he was born into an artistic family.

The Rahbanis, of Lebanese origins, are credited for their contributions to the world of music and theatre from as early as the 1960s. They have been dubbed the 'Shakespeares of the Arab world.' Omar's grandfather Mansour and his brother Assi, his father, mother, uncles, and great aunt—the renowned singer Fairuz—all have beats and theatrical scripts flowing through their veins, a desire to be on stage or in a recording studio burning within each of them.

Omar is no different. He followed closely in their footsteps, but is nonetheless determined to carve his own way and challenge what has been done

before. "From a young age, my father set us on a creative path. Toys were replaced with a piano, bicycles with a camera," Omar recalls. When probed if it was a 'normal' childhood, he shared that that was the norm within which he grew up. Today, his room is fully equipped to inspire, with a blue rotating chair situated between two keyboards. His desk is completely covered with CDs, papers with scribbled notes, half-finished symphonies, and select sleek electronics. Somehow, this confined space allows him to dream without limitation.

His room mirrors the chaos of the world—an element that Omar thrives on, extracting creativity from the disorder that surrounds him. He recounts a story from when he was five, remembers being fascinated by the pipes and strange structures of the power plant near his house that pumped thick black smoke into the clear blue sky. He created a track on the album entitled 'Zook: The Power Station' about this factory. The memory embedded within the song resonates with his contemplations of the darkening world. For Omar to exist in such a polluted world, he had to adopt a child-like imagination.

'Passport' took Omar three years to create. At first, he embarked on the journey alone, and then brought together over 180 individuals from 12 nationalities to collaborate with him. Each of the ten diverse tracks features a different texture. The team includes critically acclaimed artists like fourteen-time Grammy award winning producer Steve Rodby, who supervised the entire production of the album, Keith Carlock (Steely Dan, Sting), Wayne Krantz, Cuong Vu (Pat Metheny Group), Karim Ziad (The Zawinul Syndicate), as well as a selection of superb local musicians.

Drawing inspiration from philosophy, natural science, and the arts, each of the tracks delivers comple, liminal sounds, from jazz chords, to classical Arabic ensembles, and to boistrous yet intricate percussion sections. The album begins with an overture performed by the Kiev Philharmonic Orchestra, which injects a classical intonation and discipline. Keith Carlock infused the track 'Programmusk: Babel' with a funky New Orleans feel, delivered with a guitar number. Some tracks have pure Arabic influences running through them, such as the track such



Omar Rahbany (left) in studio.

Omar Rahbany (center) in his home studio in Lebanon.



as ‘Anarkia.’ The track boasts some notable Lebanese artists telling the story of a young man who only believes in belonging to planet earth—with no concern for religion, nationality or other affinities. ‘Anarkia’ has punchy vocals and solid beats, perhaps unsettling for the average listener. ‘Muwashahat,’ too, is influenced by Arabic culture: it is based on a poem written by Ahmed Ben Hassan Al Mousally. Omar’s grandfather handed him the poem before he died, suggesting that Omar create a piece based on it. The poem is about love, so Omar decided to turn it into an ‘audible wedding,’ ending the track with fireworks. These sounds can also be heard as AK-47 bullets grazing the sky; celebratory gunfire is prevalent in Arab cultures.

The track ‘Umbrella Woman’ tells the story of an older woman in love with a much younger man who drove her crazy. Complimentary notes, which almost come off as background music, accompany the powerful narrative at the forefront. The track ‘Tango,’ based on sound design, builds on the cinematic scope that Omar sought to create on ‘Passport.’ It begins with the sound of a door creaking open, followed by footsteps of what one could imagine to be

a slender woman, in heels, making her way to meet her lover. Each of the pair takes turns at being in control and the track comes to an end with the subtle laugh of a woman.

Other sounds on the album hail from around the world and include Jazz, Brazilian music, Argentinian tangos, Latin American rhythms, as well as Indian Konnakol—all sounds that were integrated into Omar’s childhood growing up in an animated home.

After completing the album, Omar pondered what the three-year journey was all about. “Passport deals with an identity crisis that finds its remedy in reinventing the concept of identity. It is an insight into how humans are in constant evolution and change.” Through the creative process of constructing ‘Passport,’ Omar inched closer to resolving his own identity crisis.

“I decided to recreate my own existence,” he confidently shares. “I started by saying to myself that I am a citizen of planet Earth and my nationality is that of a human being. This is my Passport.” 🌍

Passport was launched in Beirut, Lebanon, in October 2016 and in London, UK, at the Royal Court Theatre in April, 2017. Passport is available for streaming and download on iTunes, Amazon, Anghami, Spotify, Apple Music, Deezer and many other platforms.

A FOREIGN CHILD TO THE MARKET

MARWA FICHERA

Souk entrance in Tunis. Credit: Marwa Fichera



As a little ajnabi—foreign—girl,
I was fascinated by the visits to the souq
in the busy life of Tunis.

I was always welcomed
by the colourful pashmina scarfs
and the loud chants of vendors.
“Ta’ali ya ‘aroosa”—come young bride—
the men would say
with bright smiles
as they shook
hands with customers.
I would laugh and turn to my mother.
The market was covered by stretched fabric
that
trapped
the heat in
and created
refuge from
the midday sun.
The smells of spices,
especially qurfa—cinnamon—
burned the back
of my throat
as I inhaled
deeply.

A young boy
once
appeared from an alleyway
and pinched my arm
only to run away through the crowds;
I still think about it to this day.

Compassionate mothers
often
offered me bakhlawa or helwa
while they sat on stools
and silently observed.

The market path seemed extremely elongated
for my small steps.

White powdery dust between my toes
made me
uncomfortable;
I had never worn sandals before.

I miss the visits to the souq,
in the busy life of Tunis.

TALES FROM LIFE

AYHAM JABR

Dear Beholder,

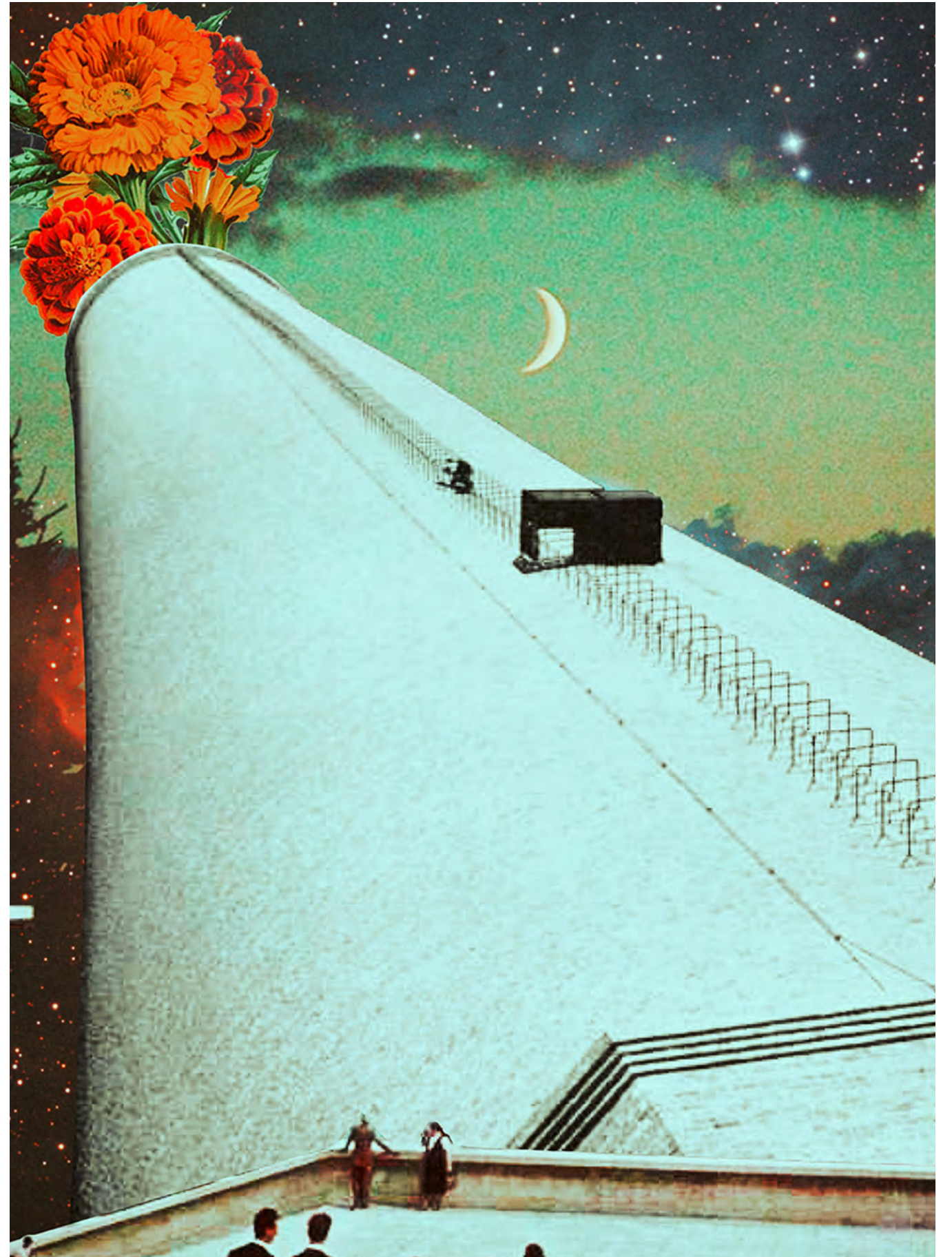
Oscar Wilde said, “All art is quite useless.”
And I can’t be more honest than that.

I am sorry, but you will not find any art that
can heal your pain or delete your bad mem-
ories or ease your sorrow or even bring back
those you have lost.

If, by chance, you find yourself in peace for ex-
ample in any art piece you view, don’t panic.

Accept it,
Embrace it,
Then let the journey suck you down the rabbit
hole.







A LOVE LETTER TO MOSUL

YOUSIF KALIAN

Iraqi market (Souk) in Mosul city, northern Iraq, between Sept. 26 and Oct. 12, 1932. G. Eric and Edith Watson Photograph Collection; Library of Congress LC-DIG-matpc-13267



TOWARDS A MOSLAWI ARCHIVE

THE FOLK MUSIC OF MOSUL, originally performed by its large Jewish population, holds a special place at the heart of Mosul. These songs encompass the best of what it means to be Moslawi: the drama surrounding weddings and cooking, the summer trips to the baths of Hamam al-Aleel and praying for fertility at Khidr Ilyas.

There is one song of all of these that is synonymous with the city of Mosul. All Moslawis can recite the lyrics with passion and beam when it is mentioned to them by Iraqis from other cities. Called Yardili, the song recounts a true love story between a poor Muslim man and a rich Christian woman that reportedly occurred around 1875. The origin

of the word Yardili is shrouded in mystery: some think it is the name of the Christian woman the Muslim man fell in love with. Others claim it is rooted in the Turkish words “yar” meaning young female and “deli” meaning pampered.

We know the song came to Mosul through an Armenian singer from Mardin in 1916 named Jabu. There are dozens of verses to the song, not all of which are compiled in one version of the song. The most well-known version is that sung by Iraqi singer Bassam Naeem, whose lyrics are:

*“How many Yardili (2x)
Oh dark skinned one, you’ve killed me*

*I fear the lord in the skies, that you will leave me
to be alone
Your father, oh beautiful dark skinned one, is not
of my religion
You stay with you religion, and I stay with mine
You fast your fifty, and I fast my thirty
They’ll wish for us cold drinks and high rooftops
I am headed to Aleppo (2x)
Of what do you want from me oh beloved (2)”*

Later on in the song, Naeem recounts the story of the lover’s wedding and all of the drama surrounding cooking food and wedding traditions. The story told in the folk song represents everything that once made Mosul great: interfaith coexistence, diversity, its beautiful weather, love and the brotherhood that existed between the three large cities of Mardin, Mosul, and Aleppo before the creation of artificial borders. This song speaks to Mosul’s relative proximity to Aleppo, as opposed to Baghdad, and shows how the city came to be to be a hub of pan-Arab nationalism.

Mosul’s children include famous Iraqis around the world; architect Zaha Hadid, oudist Munir Basheer, and renowned musician Kathem al-Safer all have deep Moslawi roots. In fact, Dame Zaha Hadid’s grandfather was a politician who worked tirelessly towards ensuring the *wilayah* of Mosul would become part of Iraq and not Turkey.

Mosul’s Arabic is in itself a mark of pride for Moslawis. It borrows heavily from Syriac, Kurdish, Turkish, and Farsi, due to its large Syriac Christian, Kurdish and Turkmen population. Aside from these influences, it doesn’t stray far from Classical Arabic and sticks to heavy letters other Arabic speakers drop, such as ق, ع, and غ.

Religion runs through the city’s bloodstream. Shrines, churches, mosques, monasteries, and madrassas were plenty in Mosul. The ancient Assyria-era winged-bull, human-faced beings called the Lamassu’s, could be found dotted throughout the city.

Muslims and Christians both visited the mosque of the Prophet Jonah, the Old Testament prophet once swallowed by the whale, where he supposedly was buried. Both visited the Monastery of the Christian mystic Mar Mattai built into the mountainside of Mt. Maqloub.

The song Yardili needs to be revisited by Iraqis and non-Iraqis, especially as Mosul is now being slowly liberated from the hell it has endured under the Islamic State (IS). The people of Mosul, now entirely devoid of its Christian community after they were expelled by IS, must not forget their ancient and beautiful relationship with Christians. Moslawis lived with monasteries and churches in the skyline. It was tradition that Muslims would cook food and dessert for their Christian neighbors during Christian holidays and their Christian neighbors would do the same for Muslim holidays.

Mosul, meaning “the place of arrival” in Arabic, lives on in its sons and daughters in cities across the world—from Detroit to Stockholm, from refugee camps in Iraq to Toronto. Mosul’s glorious past lives on and it will be the duty of all of its children, both abroad and still there, to reconstruct it and enable it to return to the pinnacle it had reached before. I pray Mosul will be rebuilt so that the Lamassu’s will guard the city once more and its children will be free to follow in their ancestors’ footsteps to trade and build and pray. 🌟

PROFILED

RAMA DUWAJI

Women of the orient are constantly dehumanized, either seen as exotic or dangerous. In reality, these women are humans, filled with dreams, emotion and hopes for their future. Here, my illustrations try to portray these women defiant against the stereotypes assigned to them. They are shown for who they really are, in black and white.



INK

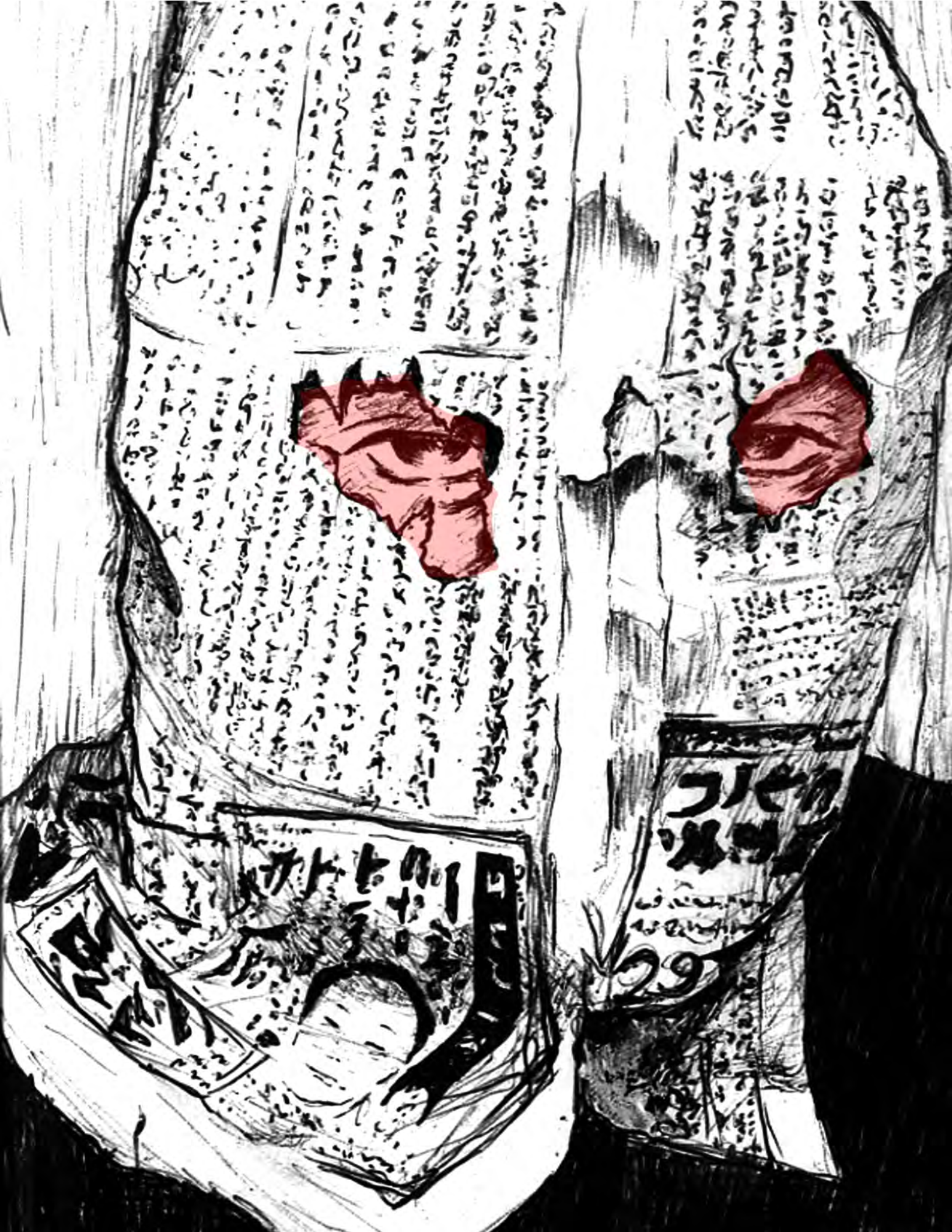
SARA ALADAYLEH

I consider my art a gateway to my perception of entities, objects, or ideas. No matter the medium, I engage as much as possible—whether in conversation or a facial expression with the viewer. The strokes that are drawn, bunched up together like scattered grains of rice to create depth, link the form of perception I try to give people to a drawing.

To perceive in one, direct way is quite flat. But to lose yourself in a platform such as ink drawings is to disorient the perception of the norm.

Some of these drawings depict a student striving to be an image of a being that is easily molded—a toxic and unreachable ideal.







WHEN WE WONDER

FATIMA ALSUWAIDI

I.

Your voice is what I long for
It starts, stirs and spins
And slides through my lungs
It waters the flowers in
Grows them at once
It brings life and love
And I am born all over again.

II.

What I feel for you
Goes beyond the universe,
It's more than I can confess
I hope that whatever I do
Doesn't make you think
That I love you less.

III.

What if years from now
You get homesick
And start looking for someone
And you think of me
And realize that you've lost me
When you thought I'd always be here.
I hope it hits you
Crashes you
Like it did to me.

IV.

I fall in love with the idea of people
The ones I created in my head
I create them
With all the things I want them to be
And all the things I want them to tell me
And I fall in and out of love with the idea of them.

V.

I am an ocean
A whole universe is in my head
I am more than the bruises on my skin
I'm more than the bags under my eyes.

DUAL TRANSCENDENCE

YASMINE RUKIA



MALE-DOMINATED INSTITUTIONS CAN'T
STRUCTURE FEMALE SPIRITUALITY

On the steps of a mosque, a woman sits between two men. This woman, an unnamed She, is draped in black. On one side of her heart-shaped face, an inky wing juts from her eyelid and her cheeks are blushed. She is staring to her left. To the right when she looks, her face is a clean slate and her eyes are soft with compassion.

They are mute among the plotted plants and red mulch, wiry shrubs and Japanese maples, until the call for prayer.

Simultaneously, under their breath, they all mutter the first three of the ninety-nine. These three are daily incantations and two of them are grammatically feminine: “In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, and the Merciful.” Both words الرَّحْمَن (Compassionate) and الرَّحِيم (Merciful) are [linguistically rooted](#) in the word, womb (رحم). God is neither male nor female but a genderless paradox worthy of our worship. It is only through linguistic facets that this genderless paradox exists; through this linguistic paradigm they contain both the feminine and masculine equally.

Society doesn't reflect this harmony, however, nor does it care to. The feminine mystique that is praised in pagan religions of old goddesses and gnostic traditions of the saint are in direct opposition to the Islam's representation of the female, wherein women have been demonized, sexualized, and infantilized, regardless of having made social and cultural strides such as almost gaining the right to vote globally. Women are merely mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, obedient and, if none of the above, they are defaulted to being “whores.”

“The status of women,” or rather, the way in which womanhood is understood, practiced, and communicated, is a stale topic that has deviated from salient truth: women are people, just like men; we give life, but are often forgotten; we're humble goddesses, nonetheless hungry for respect. The duality in our nature—of being human yet god-like—mirrors the paradox of God's lack of gender: both contain and manifest a spectrum of being. The devil, however, is in the details, from

east to west, and west to east. Women's bodies and appearances are the battlefronts of cultural hegemony and supremacy, whether hijab or size two, or tragically both. Women inhabit a space that revolves around their inherent duality: both sacred and disrespected, thanks to their gender.

The status of women, then, is never actually about women; it's about power and the access to it. Those who dominate (read: men) control the way in which women are represented, tilting the balance of God's own genderless paradox to an oppressive imbalance. Men decide that women can't lead, can't be trusted, are temptresses, and emotional-meltdown queens. And, for some women, this status quo is too good of a lie to leave behind.

But, back to the woman sitting on the steps of the mosque. She is in two places at once. She thrives, despite obstacles: a pokey, pungent flower growing through the brown grout cracks in cool grey cement.

The three rise and walk through the heavy oak doors carved with arabesque stars of the mosque and stop before the lush green carpet within. The two men take off their shoes and walk into the plush enclave for prayer. She instead beelines for the bathroom and enters a stall. She's read, and re-read, the Quran for mention of taboo and Googles it again on her smart phone, contemplating her female dilemma. She is reassured after finding that the single utterance of menstruation flow coincides with sex. Can't have it if you're ragging, but nothing connecting it with prayer. Jurisprudence is written by men who don't bleed, and she thinks of the women who cry “It's a mercy!” when they can skip out on ritual guilt-free. She bidets generously

like always, and decides she will do it. Her biology doesn't have to, and won't, get in the way of her worship. If she's wrong, she'll find out on the day of reckoning. She puts the 'urf of the ummah on the back-burner.

Geo-political turbulence—borne of the colonialist drone strikes and coup-d'états ravaging the Middle East—compromises the free-choice clause of the Quran, which says that there is no compulsion in religion (2:256). Order and structure are prized over God-given right and the state arbitrates on judgment day. Much like the American patriarchy—filled with asses and elephants, where men make decisions about women's bodies—the women's councils of Islamic theocracy are female ghost-towns.

She stares at her reflection in the bathroom mirror and soothes the fringes of her hijab. She wraps and re-wraps it until she is a presentable package. She feels good, looks good, and knows herself to be lucky.

What is a piece of cloth, anyway? she thinks to herself as she re-enters the prayer room and takes her spot in the back with the women. That no children are screaming is usually a good sign before prayer, as are colorful hijabs and maxi dresses with cardigans. She isn't the odd one out this time. She scoffs at the segregation. Somehow her body is inherently sexual without meaning to be. But her anger fades with each touch of her head to ground

and back. The power of gathering for prayer sets her at ease, regardless of the gendered imbalance of power she acknowledges around her.

Hijab is consent. Hijabis are ummah personified: not just individuals, but the boundaries of east and west. When men talk about women in classical Islam and even today, the consent of the woman is sacrificed for the whole of the ummah to remain “authentic,” to strengthen the mainstream romantic narrative of Muslim women as the mothers of believers, designated “flag-bearers.” Women in seventh century Arabia were mere property; things were done without their consent. Islam laid the framework for the progression of women in society, whether it was through the right to divorce—compare that to 1970 in the US; to inherit; to work, and to witness—at twice the rate of men in a blooming legal system.

The three, the two men and one woman, leave the mosque together. Their strides match in rhythm over the glossy granite floors, polished steps, past the shrubbery and cracked asphalt. They pile into a Ford Fusion and drive home.

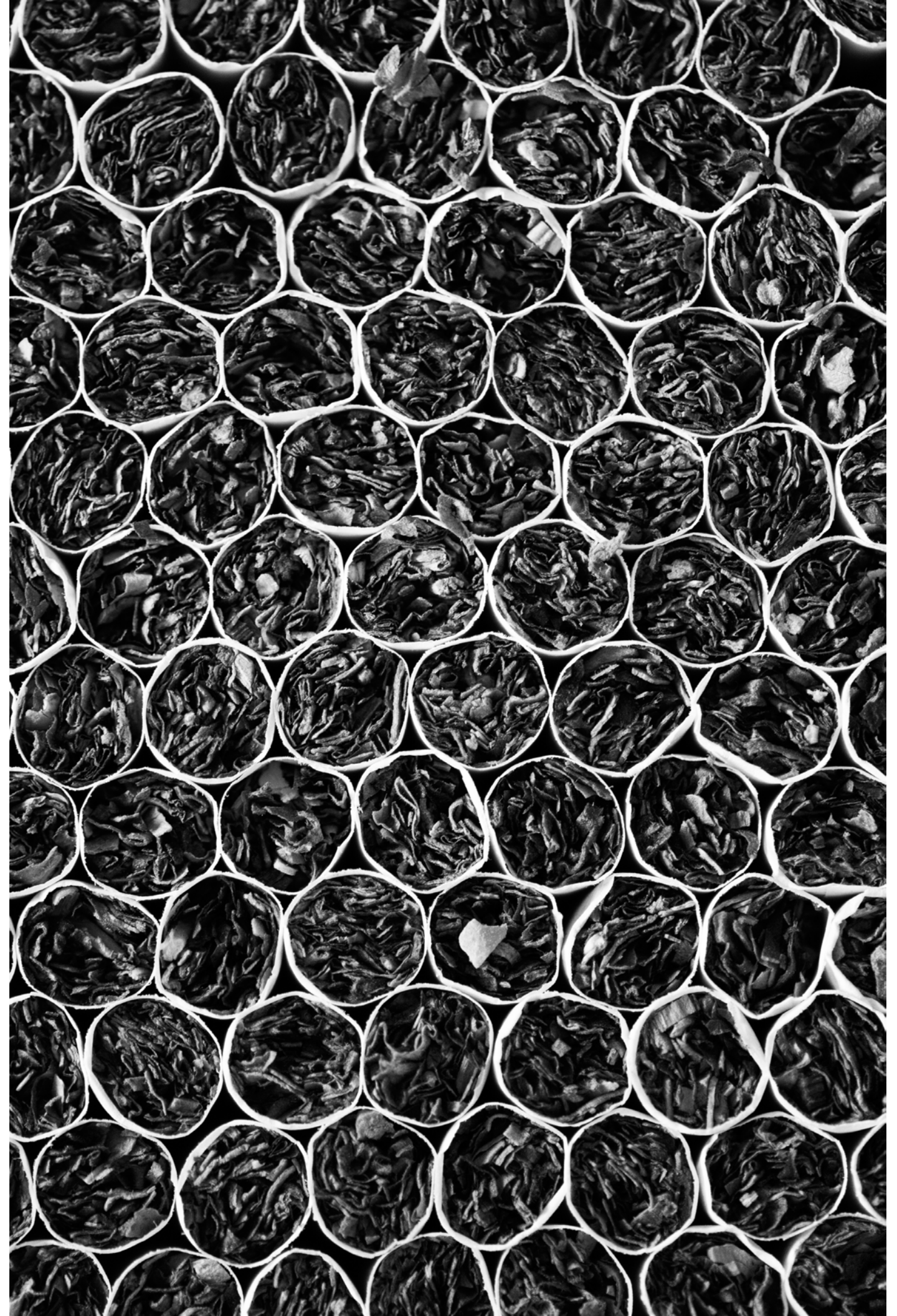
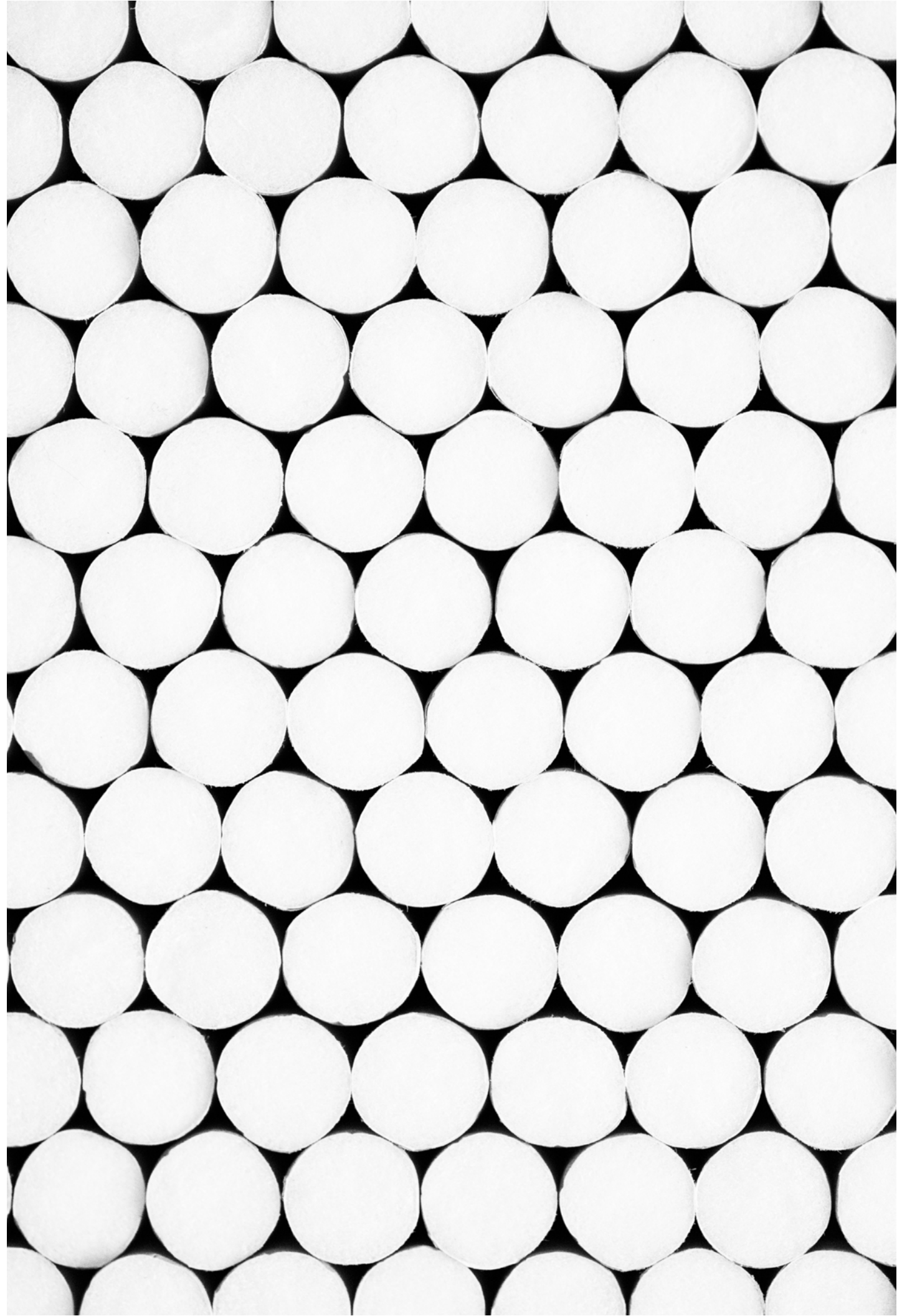
“The status of women” is a question the beginning dispelled, in the name of the compassionate, the merciful, the womb: *you have no power here.* 🌙

MY MOST PRECIOUS أعز ما أملك

BAYAN ABDULLATEEF

These series were inspired by a personal experience that is very relatable to many girls. At around the age of twelve, one of my teachers said to me: “A girl’s honor is like a matchstick.” In other words, once a girl had been ‘used,’ she would immediately lose her worth. Years later I realized how destructive that comment was. I began paying attention to all the times that girls were compared to consumable objects: diamonds, pearls, flowers, fruits, candy, pens, cigarettes, and so forth. I was particularly interested in deconstructing what such analogies signify in terms of how we think of women within society.





UNSEEING EYE

عين لا تبصر

NOUR HIFAOUI FAKHOURY



In a violent society, anxiety rules our core of being. Not being able to free ourselves from our egoistic decisions, we find ourselves lost between our perception of reality and reality itself. People are drawn by their instinct to procreate without considering the consequences nor evaluating the danger of our current world. Through these illustrations, I try to portray the cruelty inside us as we try to liberate ourselves from it.





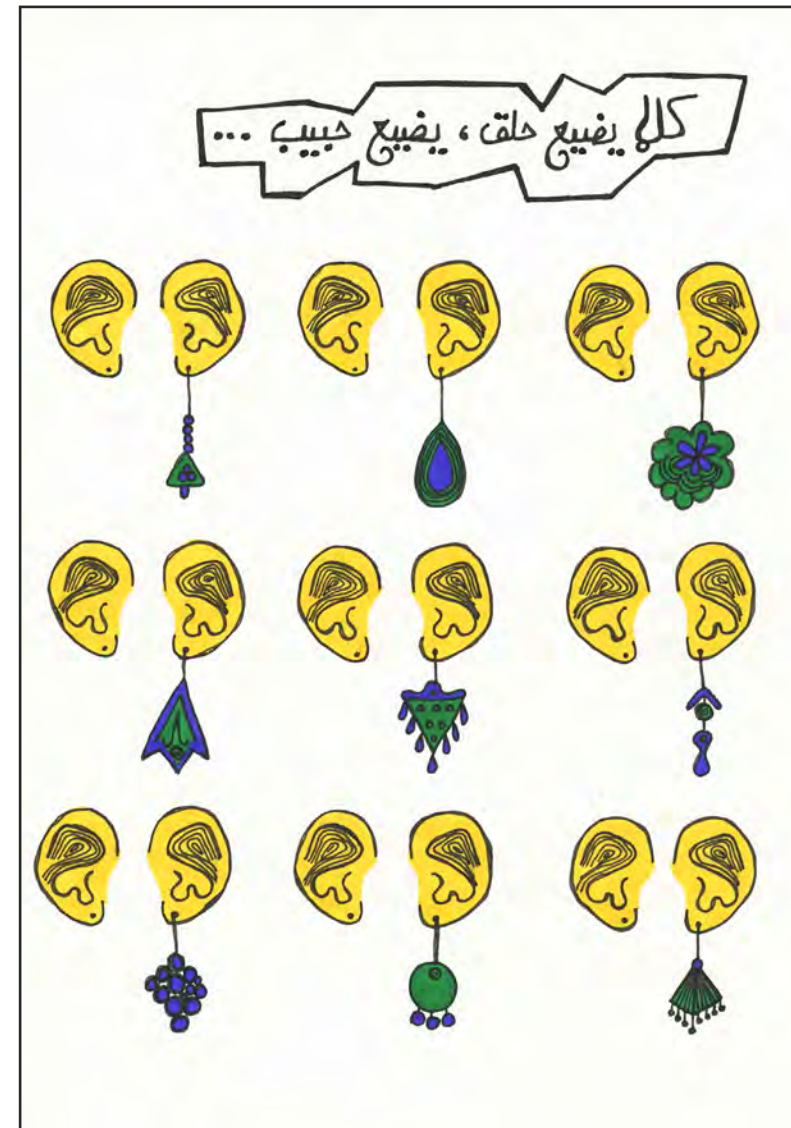
MISH MIN EL MARIKH

RAWAND ISSA

Without any collaboration with publishing houses, or any commitment to the rules of the market, "[Mish Min El Marikh/Not from Mars](#)" illustration zine was created. These four images are excerpts from four sections in the zine.

The zine speaks to relatable personal situations. They are common to many of us insofar as the personal is always in one way or another also political and thus public.

This publication's goal is not meant for profit, rather merely to be seen, and to be seen through it.



ONLY ART WILL SAVE US

OMAR ALHASHANI & DAYNA ASH

Haven for Artists headquarters in Mar Mikheil, Beirut, Lebanon.
Credit: Tamara Rasamny, August 10th 2017 with permission of Dayna A.



HAVEN FOR ARTISTS IS BASED ON COOPERATION—NOT COMPETITION

In July 2017, Khabar Keslan's Omar Alhashani spoke to Dayna Ash—director of Beirut-based Haven for Artists—about running an arts NGO, the considerations of protest in Lebanon, and discussing Sartre without being pretentious.

...

Omar Alhashani: Hello, Dayna. Thanks for taking time out of your personal life to talk.

D: It's Lebanon. Everything takes time, and everything is incredibly tedious.

Dayna Ash: *[Laughs]* There is no personal time with Haven, darling. We've been pushing the envelope further these weeks because we finally got registration as an NGO after six years of waiting. So, we've hit the ground running.

O: Has becoming an NGO made it easier, now that you have that status?

D: It's just about being recognized as being outside of politics. We're not governmental, so we're no longer dictated by the whole, "you need to know this guy, to know this guy, to do whatever." We're working on being able to

provide a space for artists, thinkers, or anybody who's got something they want to work on. Anyone can come and live in the residence—as long as they're working on art. So far, being an NGO now means we can get funding and our staff can get paid. All the amount of work we've been doing has been for the genuine love of arts, and now we can finally help all of these artists—with more than just a networking platform, but actual finances and resources.

O: You can give them all the resources they need to realize their projects now?

D: Pretty much. When an artist asks me—let's say a painter—for three canvases and some paints, I was only able to give them a single canvas and half of the paint. Now, we can give them what they asked for. So we're taking out the struggle for struggling artists as best we can... Sweet, sweet redemption!

O: So how did you get into this work in the first place? What made you interested in providing a space for artists in Lebanon?

D: Well, I was originally a poet—one of the very few performing poets in Beirut—and I also had a band. But there was always competition between artists for people's attention. It just so happened that most of our peers were hosting similar events and parties—so we were technically separating the attention, dividing it right down the middle. The only ones really benefitting from this division were the bars, locations, and venues because, when it comes down to it, artists want as much exposure as possible. The moment you compete, however, you are losing exposure.

But there's no way we can say, "Oh, well this is an artist and this isn't one"—hell no. There's no way

you can actually compete when it comes to the arts. I mean, to me, it's completely ridiculous to pit two different artists against each other, because nobody is the same. Still, they need your group of friends, and you need theirs; and it just didn't seem right to make artists compete so consistently.

So we decided that we were going to start hosting and bringing all of our friends together—who are artists—to perform on the same stage. That's how it started: just a bunch of people who wanted to perform together, and not fight for people's attention.

O: What is a typical day at Haven? Lots of events?

D: There's never a 'typical day' here at Haven. As you must know by now, there's always a learning curve when you establish something. For the past 6 years, we've accumulated, in a sense, credibility. We've shown people how sincere we are in our commitment to accessibility in the arts. We've never thrown a party over \$10, where we're talking about 7 bands, an exhibition, spoken word, and a gallery. You can really experience all of this without having to go, "Oh I can't afford to go to Station Beirut today because I went to another bar yesterday."

Prior to opening the Haven house, it was just events popping up throughout the country in different galleries, different venues, all of that. Then, exactly a year ago—or a year and a month ago—we decided that it was time to have a house. A tangible place. Let me put it this way: we go to all these venues, build these great beautiful elaborate exhibitions, installations, stages, designs, and all of that. Then we leave them to be tossed away, because we had nowhere to take them. It's very discouraging for artists to watch their installations get broken down and thrown out.

You get to a point where you're like, "inno, we need something that gives us a 'home' feeling—a place where we can work, a place where we can discuss Sartre without feeling pretentious," you know? If you just wanted to talk about art, there really was not one place you could go. You had to divvy up all of your time and attention and resources to be able to get involved in all kinds of art.

Whereas, in Haven, a typical day is, you walk in in the morning, the shift residents are all artists—people who take shifts everyday, they cover six hours of the Haven shifts, they open the house. It's all self-service, we have everything available, people just walk in, they can cook, they can make whatever they want, we have three lounges. And we have three live-in artists. So the moment you walk into Haven, you're automatically surrounded by at least ten people working on a project. That's the regular day. The other day we had GreenPeace hosting a workshop with designers, with some of their designers, some of ours. We had around 200 people coming in and out throughout the day.

So it depends on what the activities are. The premise is to create a safe space for people to discuss, to collaborate, to meet, to network, to feel at home—but still feel that pressure of, "I need to work"—to not go to a cafe and have a waitress go around them for hours because they have to order another coffee, or else feel very uncomfortable.

O: It seems that Haven functions as a network for artists. How does that work? Do you actively network?

D: Of course, we actively network; this is one of the basic elements. There are three of us board members that are active at the moment. There's myself, Thea Khoury, and Yasmine Rifaii. Yasmine

and I handle the creative aspects of Haven: she is the creative director and I am the director. We can't—and don't—miss a single opening. Our job is to always be around, to see what's happening, and to meet all the people making it happen.

Every residency in Europe has been officially in contact with us, and we've been in contact with them. We're trying to establish our biggest program yet: the International Artists Exchange, where we take twelve artists from anywhere in Europe or the United States to come to Beirut, and fly twelve artists from the Middle East out to them.

I'm flying out in September to have meetings with all these international residencies. Thea is going to London and the US, and Yasmine is moving to Berlin to set up a base there. We have a base in New York—well, I mean a few people in New York who I'd like to call a base, but in the end, they're just New Yorkers, so I can't depend on them 100%.

O: I didn't know you were dealing with art galleries and residencies internationally. I thought it was completely regional based.

D: We are completely regional based. We are for Arab artists, and this is why we want to create the International Artists Exchange. If I hear one more Arab artist say, "If I were in Europe, I would have made it"... Just take it out of their way, and let's see if they can make it!

I've lived in California for sixteen years, in Berlin for around a year, and in Beirut for nearly ten years, and all of us lived outside of Lebanon for a very, very long time. We all came back for this, because, frankly, we believe that it is needed here. Not only is there no infrastructure—there's no support. This feeling of absence lingers and it makes the idea of staying intolerable. What

Wood chandelier at Haven for Artists headquarters. With permission of Dayna A.



we want to do is slowly start fixing these issues. Hopefully, within the next year—I don't want to jump the gun—but we'll have launched our social change department, which is working on campaign awareness all over the Middle East.

We want to get to this point, but our first goal right now is the International Artists Exchange. I want people from Europe to come and realize that we are not all about war. [Long pause] I want this misconception of Western ideology that's been thrust upon Arabs to be changed when they go there and see. It's really just a cultural exchange, and there's no greater way to do it than through art, because art is the only thing that is not inherently confrontational. Rather, it provokes: it provokes an idea, it provokes you to think, but it doesn't force you to. It doesn't hate you, it doesn't beat you, it doesn't yell at you if you don't understand. It lets you take in what you can, and hopefully, through that, you go past just what you know, and into what you can understand.

O: Do you think there is a need to change the way people see the region? How should we go about it?

D: The only way you can get them to see is if they come, or if we go to them with actual content. Because whether we like it or not, it's all based on archiving. It's not what you're learning now—

it's what you've already learned. And we need to get them to unlearn this kind of understanding of Arabs, or this insanity that we don't speak English, or that we all wear the abeyeh, or that if our women in Beirut wear skimpy shirts somebody rapes or beats them—you know?

To me, it has to happen because they have nothing to fight for in Europe. With all the struggle that artists go through, all the material and emotional turmoil, it's all internal. It's not a reaction to the external facets stopping them. Whereas artists in Lebanon are so overwhelmed by the external that the only thing they can work on is the internal. This is where balance can happen.

O: Would you say that that's the main regional difference within the arts between—just to essentialize a little here—the Middle East and North Africa and the 'Western world'?

D: I mean, when your biggest problem in Europe is how you're going to pay rent? In Europe, or the States... or anywhere really [Laughs], you don't have to worry about someone running you over because they ran a stoplight. You don't have to worry about cars being parked literally on sidewalks, you can just walk—no anxiety. We wake up with drilling next door, to the natoon screaming, honking, no stoplights, stepping on dogshit.

There's absolutely nothing that takes away anxiety in the Middle East. Everything is anxious and everyone is angry, and for no other reason than that they have no idea what's coming next. And nothing is made easy by the government. For fuck's sake, we have six hours of no electricity a day. We run out of water most of the time. The concept of basic living is not given, so of course our anxiety, our state of rebellion, is always a lot higher: because you gotta make do with what you can, right?

O: Sounds like you have a lot of frustrations with the way things are run in the region.

D: They're running the country into the ground!

O: You're not the only one that thinks that. I think all of us from Beirut have the line "*Kis ikhta*, we've been dealing with this for 40 years now" recurring through our heads. And I'm in my 20s. But I have to ask, why does one of the first lines on your website clearly state that, "Haven is an apolitical organization"?

D: Mainly it's because of where I live, so that we're not misconstrued. And frankly, we don't get into politics. The things that are aggravating us, we do through art, not through politics: not through changing policy, not being abrasive, not going down to protest. Only art will save us. Everything else is going to keep perpetuating the situation and keep getting people aggressive.

When the protests for the trash pick-up happened, I was right there. We were all right there when we got gunned down with water guns and stink bombs and tear gas and all of that; we all went through this. But then we woke up the next day and went to work. [Laughs] I mean, there's just not much more you can do!

When it comes to Haven, the reason we don't want politics is because we realized that it was just going to create more and more tension. Because we, as people, as the minority—because that's what we are in Beirut, [Laughs] we're the minority. People who can say, "No, I don't need a politician to pay me so that I can live and feed my five children," those are the minority.

O: So about this minority: who are you reaching out to? And do you feel like you've been successful so far?

D: Sometimes I feel like we are reaching, sometimes I feel like we're stagnant, but that's just because the times change so often so you constantly have to change with it, so you never really are 1000% sure of how many people you're affecting. But we are there for everyone, nonstop. I've had people show up at our door—who weren't artists—and needed a place to live. They were in need and they were kicked out, for whatever reason—we don't have to go into that—bas inno they're always welcome. The word "Haven" is there for a reason: It is a haven, it is a refuge, a safe place for people to come and talk. A drag queen can put their makeup on in Haven. And it happens, because it's real.

O: I never experienced spaces like that growing up in Beirut. It really comforts me knowing you guys are physically there right now. In Mar Mkheiyal right? What's it like being on such a popular street?

D: Luckily we're on a street parallel to Mar, off to the side. Haven is the *quietest* place in this entire district. I adore it. We have a patio, and you can just sit outside all day reading or writing or working, and it's very free. But the moment you are done working, you can pack up your shit and

go to a bar right across the street. We love being so accessible, but at the same time we don't have signs on the road. So there is no sign that says "Haven" outside of our door, you have to look for it, go behind these big bushes and bushels of trees, and... [sighs]

O: Would you mind if I tell people about it?

D: Of course not! We never restrict anyone. I walked in yesterday, actually, and I was in Tripoli working with 'March Lebanon'. Since we're architects and carpenters too, we went up there and checked out their space—really wonderful thing they're doing in Tripoli, as well—but when I came back down, I walked into the house and saw this complete mess! The chairs were moved around, all sorts of things were upside down, and this strong light was shining against a wall. And there's just this French man who put a... *laza2 war2a 3al 7eyt* [stuck a sheet of paper on the wall] and used the projector to project onto the wall! There's no "Oh you can't do that" or "Please put your feet down" or "Oh you have to pay." There is a resident to help you with anything. Anybody coming in will never be stopped, and will be welcomed warmly.

O: You've touched upon it intermittently during our conversation, but what can you tell us about this new arts residency program?

D: The Haven residency has been ongoing for a year; we just didn't know it was there. We were just offering people a place to live at first, so it was like, "Hey guys I'm working on this project, it's costing me a lot of money, and I can't afford rent: can I stay here?" And then suddenly, Yasmine and I were sitting in Haven with Paul—

one of the residents that had flown in, hayete—and he looked at us, turned to Yasmine, and says, "This is the greatest residency I've ever been in." Yasmine turns around to him and says, "You're not in a residency; you're at home."

So we had a moment there and realized that we can have both of these elements, where we give artists a residency but we're also giving them home. We're not giving them white walls where they sit in a corner then they have to go to the atelier, work, come home, and sleep, we're giving them an art house that they can constantly produce in.

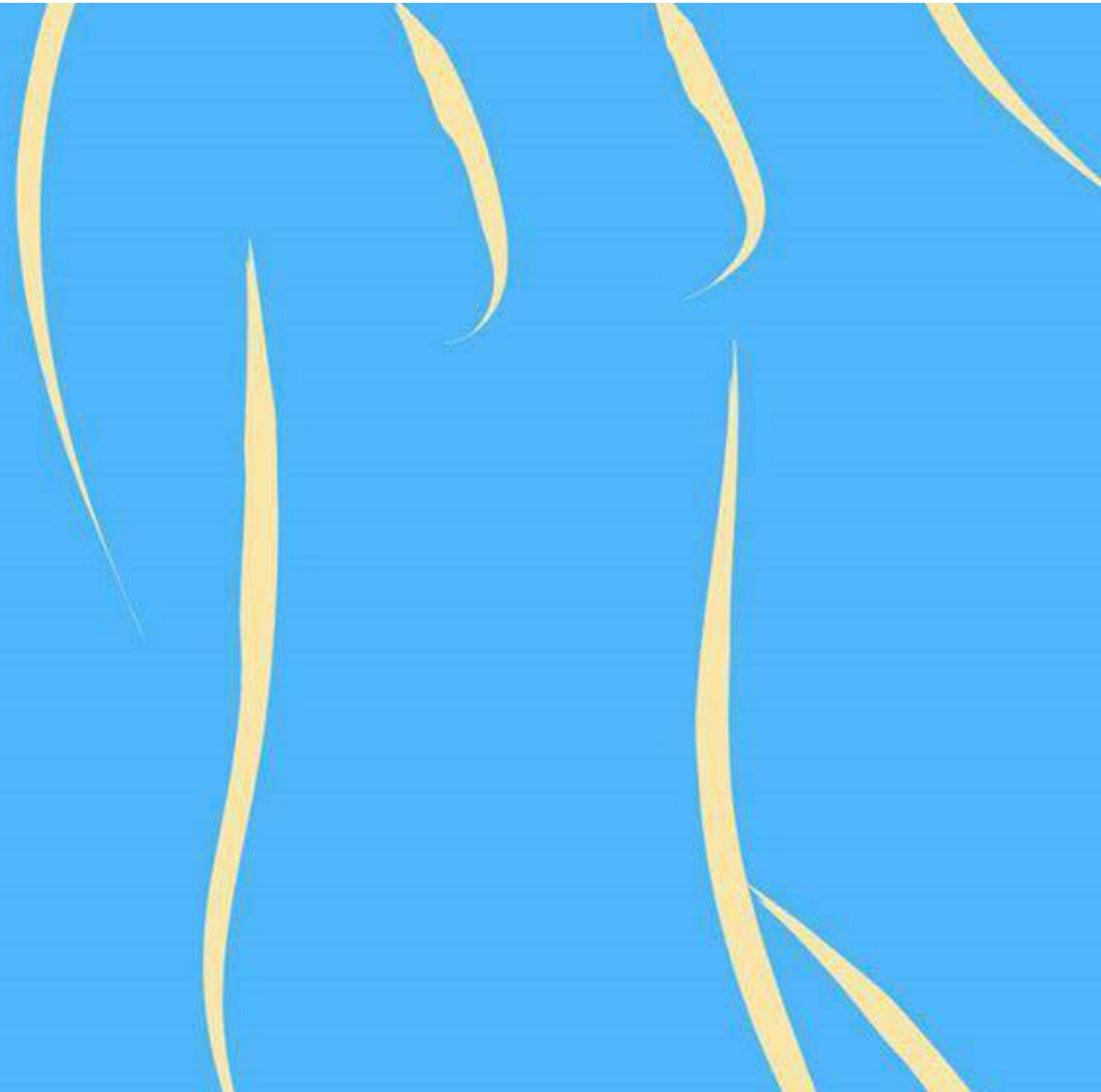
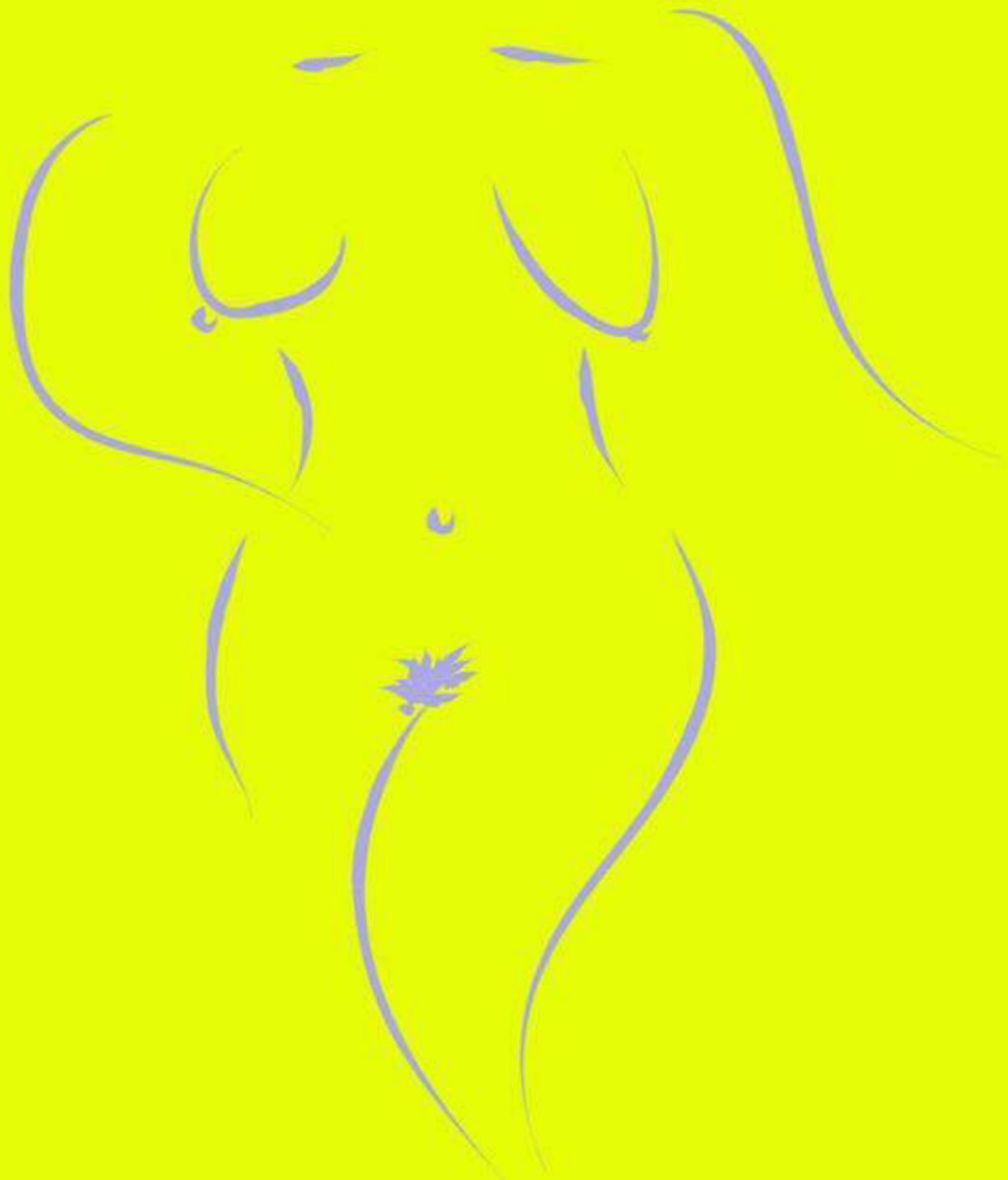
O: Okay, last question. A random young artist who's on the margins and doesn't have access to resources somehow comes across this interview: how would you tell them to get involved?

D: Send us an email, and you're already involved. It's really that easy. We do not want to put restrictions. When you apply, we do everything in our power to get you grants. If you're an artist and, let's say, you want to write a proposal for one of your projects, Haven has a team member that sits there with you and teaches you how to write it. When we go hopefully in September with myself and Tea, we want to create these kinds of bridges between different residencies, so that it becomes simpler and less intimidating for us to apply as Arabs or emerging artists—I don't wanna say Arabs anymore; emerging artists are always hesitant. Regardless, they can just come to Haven and be like, "Okay, who are your bridges, and how can I get there?" And if their work isn't "good enough," then it's my job, and the creative team's job, to help them get there—not just throw them out. 🍷

Visit havenforartists.org for more information on the organization and its new residency program.

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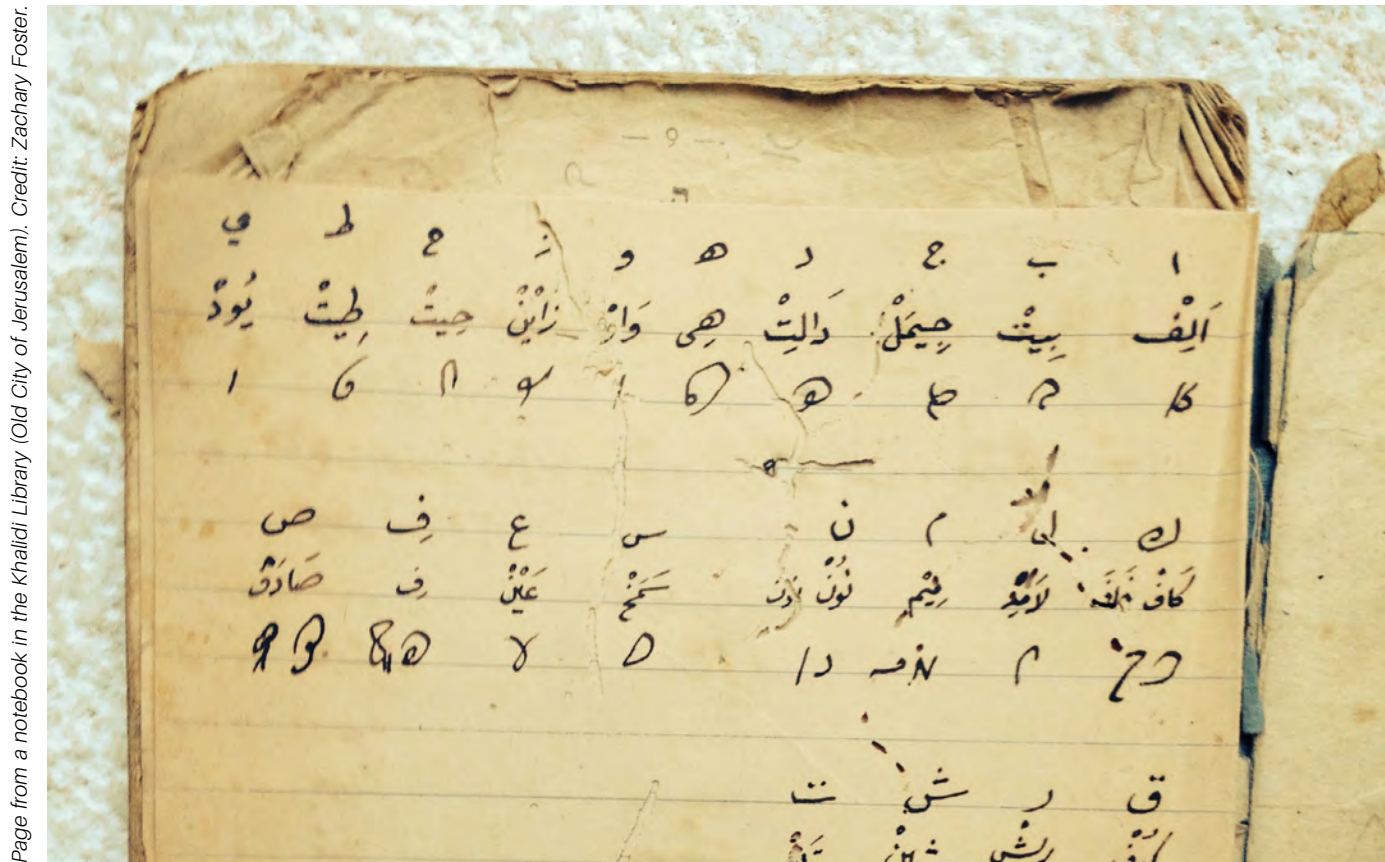
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NO ONE WILL READ THIS

ZACHARY J. FOSTER



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS SHOULD BE THE FIRST THING YOU WRITE

Acknowledgments are usually the most interesting parts of dissertations. They are wells of information about advisors, insights into networks of patronage, friendship circles and bodily fluids that have circulated around the field. An old college friend happened to peak over my shoulder one Saturday afternoon in January 2017 while I was drafting these very words. “You are already writing your acknowledgements months before your dissertation is due?” he

asked in disbelief. I said: “I’m an idiot for starting this late. This is the only part of the dissertation anyone’s going to read.”

To start, I would like to thank my advisor, dissertation committee members, and most importantly, the true inspiration behind this project: Lady Gaga. This dissertation would have been impossible to complete without having listened to Just Dance on repeat for 10,000 hours. Full disclosure: to diversify

my neurological stimulations, I also listed to Poker Face and Bad Romance.

But there is also a long trail of people I actually know without whom this dissertation would have impossible to write: Ze’ev Maghen, who first introduced me to pre-modern Middle East history and who also taught me to never let history get in the way of a great joke; Big Bird, for teaching me the importance of sharing; Nicole Fruth, for nominating me to be a part of the extremely elite “community of entrepreneurs, artists and innovative professionals like myself” called Ivy. Were it not for that boost to my self-worth, I doubt this dissertation would have ever come to completion. I would also like to thank the Twitter handler @realjamesbowker. Without having followed me, I would have never been able to reach this important milestone in my life: 289 twitter followers (note: by the time you are reading this, that number will have probably since decreased).

I’d also like to emphasize my great indebtedness to all the archivists and librarians I’ve met over the past six years who played no role in the dissertation at all – but who are important to acknowledge to show I, in fact, visited archives and libraries. Some archivists deserve special thanks: the dude at the Lebanese National Archives who offered me three coffees and a free copy of a book about the Tripoli Islamic court records, but not access to the court records themselves. How could I have forgotten the extreme political sensitivity of eighteenth century marriage records and waqf property repairs? Later I discovered the entire collection digitized and browsable at the ISAM library in Istanbul.

I would like to acknowledge the guy—his name also escapes me—I met on a fall 2014 afternoon circulating the cavernous alleyways of Jerusalem’s Old City on a hunt for the Khalidi Library. He mistakenly thought I was part of the Khalidi family, which was the greatest mistake I’ve ever neglected to correct. It got me access to browse the library’s uncatalogued shelves. The Khalidis assumed my Arabic was “heritage” Arabic—even if they were shocked to discover how quickly their language deteriorated in the diaspora. The whole experience was exhilarating, not because of anything I found in the library, but because I got to pretend to be member of the Khalidi family.

Being a member of the family got me in the door, but it didn’t get me access to everything. I had asked multiple times to see the personal papers of Yusuf Diya Pasha al-Khalidi and Ruhi al-Khalidi, two late 19th century intellectuals whose papers were housed in the library. Strangely, the library staff insisted no such papers existed. So I pulled out my copy Rashid Khalidi’s Palestinian Identity and flipped to page 267, which read: “Unpublished sources: In the Khalidiyya Library, Jerusalem.” Several of their letters were on the list. At that point, things got awkward. I was told the files were in the Beirut branch of the library. I politely told the librarian on staff that there was no branch of the Khalidiyya library in Beirut. Incidentally, he knew that. I haven’t been allowed back since.

Arabic was useful in the Khalidiyya Library but less so at the library of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem, and my Armenian was abysmal at the time. I knew three-quarters

of the alphabet, and the word *Tagavor*, which means king, I think. My plan to gain access to the library's rich collections was to spot the word Tagavor someplace on the wall and let the librarians marvel at my profound mastery of Armenian. The plan failed: when the time came, I forgot the word, Tagavor.

Let's also acknowledge the bureaucrats who served the Ottoman Empire and who left behind a paper trail of millions of documents. Their obsession with bureaucratic pleasantries, arcane Sultanic salutations, and abysmal handwriting have only one obvious purpose: to make the lives of future historians a nightmare. Once properly deciphered, Ottoman documents exhibit a second quality of great bureaucratic writing: their ability to induce sleep quickly.

Muslim court scribes also deserve our acknowledgement. They had even worse handwriting than the Ottoman bureaucrats and used almost as obscure language. During my period of dissertation research, I sat down for an afternoon of reading a single sixteenth century Jerusalem court record with one the world's foremost experts, 'Abla Sa'id Muhtadi. Three hours passed, and we had partially deciphered six lines of text. By we, I mean 'Abla.

Lastly, I'd like to acknowledge the financial support I received from Princeton University. PhD. students at Princeton are among the most privileged in the world. We make more money than professors do in countries like Russia and Greece. We can also request an unlimited number of books free of charge from any library in the world. According

to Princeton's records, I've requested 292 books in total, and have received most of them. When the inter-library loan staff see my name, I imagine they think, "someone break Foster's kneecaps." I also frequently attended Princeton's so-called "language tables," where students enjoy free dinner at a campus dining hall but must commit to speaking a designated foreign language for the whole dinner conversation. I confess to having attended those language tables with great diligence—and at torturous pain to the other attendees. I also frequently enjoyed free lunch around campus—at least until my immunity wore off to cruel and unusual punishment—the brown bag lunch talk. My department also offered free coffee, tea and filtered water. I nearly considered sleeping in the student lounge and showering at Princeton's Dylan Gym to save money. The plan ran into an unforeseen hurdle: my girlfriend was living with me at the time. Money makes the world go round, and if Princeton controlled the world, it would be going round and round a bunch.

Acknowledgments usually conclude with bodily fluid exchanges, also known as significant others. In my case, the critical person to acknowledge here is Jennifer Garner, the lead covert agent on the late 1990s and early 2000s hit action series, *Alias*. My subconscious told me to seek out a partner who appears to lead a life as a double-agent for a shadowy underground organization, speaks more languages than knows what to do with them, and makes a killer Bolognese.

Alas, it hasn't killed me yet.☹

DISORIENT PLAYLIST

by Yasmine

The background is a solid red color. Overlaid on this are large, white, 3D block letters. The letters 'S', 'O', and 'P' are visible in the upper and middle sections, while the letters 'O', 'P', and 'T' are visible in the lower section. The letters have a thick, extruded appearance with visible edges and shadows, giving them a three-dimensional look. They are scattered across the frame, with some letters partially cut off by the edges of the image.

Khabar Keslan is an independently run, volunteer-based, primarily English-language online review featuring art and critique from the Middle East, North Africa, and South (East) Asia (MENASEA). This is a dedicated platform for dissidents, artists, critics, and those on the margins to express themselves.

We are deeply unimpressed by the representation of the region; hence our name, "Khabar Keslan," or lazy news. Coverage of the Middle East, North Africa, and South (East) Asia tends to emphasize violence, chaos, and corruption. But the region is also complex, beautiful, and wrought with passionate voices. As much as destruction characterizes the region, so does creation. To chip at the monolith entrapping our diverse identities, we seek a more representative texture for the MENASEA—through active expressions of art, cross-community solidarity, and critical analysis.